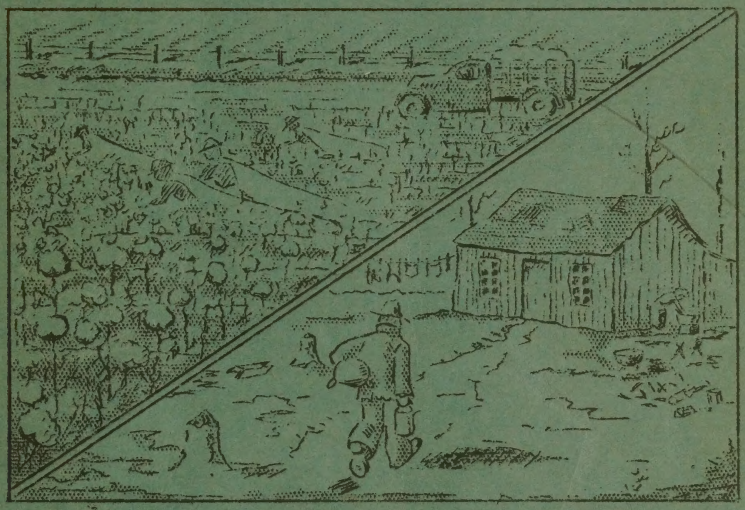
RICH LAND POOR PEOPLE



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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RICH LAND - POOR PEOPLE

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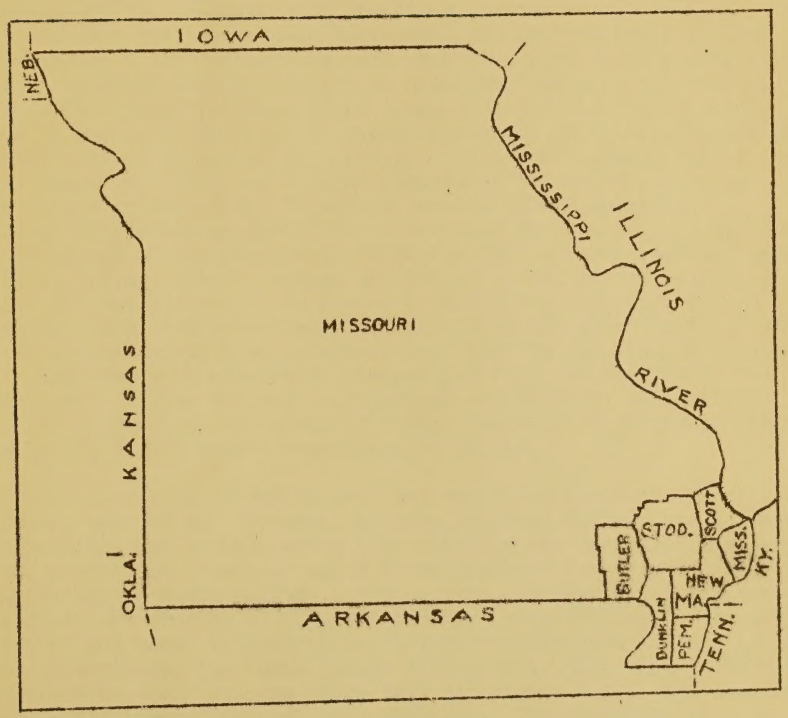
THE SEVEN COUNTIES INCLUDED IN THE
SURVEY OF SOUTHEAST MISSOURI



CHAPTER I

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI

A Paradox of Rich Land and Poor People

Living conditions on the fertile lands of the Missouri Lowlands, which includes the seven southeastern counties of Missouri, where the Mississippi Delta meets the Ozark Highlands, and the "Colonial" agriculture of the South merges into the agricultural economy of the Corn Belt, refute the American myth that a region of rich agricultural lands will always be populated by healthy, happy, farm people living in security and enjoying the benefits of a rich community life.

This belief that there were few social problems in regions of rich land was rather well justified in years past in regions where a system of general agriculture was practiced, which, through crop rotation and the production of livestock, tended to maintain soil fertility and give year-round employment to the farm family. Such a system was a firm foundation upon which superior rural living could be developed and maintained with an accompanying sense of security. As soil fertility diminished over large areas of the United States owing to improper land use, we became conscious of a definite decline in the level of living of farm people and in the institutions of the farm community. This was brought forcefully to our attention in 1910 by the report of the Roosevelt Country Life Commission. Although the declining fertility of the land brought about a decline in the status of the farm family's living and in rural institutions, still it did not result, except in limited areas, in such extreme social disorganization as to create a distinctly under privileged class for whom the future held little of economic opportunity or of solidarity of family life. Farmers continued to live in good houses; their children were adequately clothed and fed; and the family had ready access to the various institutions and services maintained by the village and the surrounding farming community which were available to all of the people regardless of status.

As a result of our alarm over the rapid depletion of our soil resources most of our research has been centered on land-use adjustment problems and we have often lost sight of the fact that the only reason we need be concerned about these problems is because of their relationship to human welfare and security. We have become solicitous about the erosion of the soil and have been willing to spend more time and money in correcting it than we have been willing to spend in assisting the human beings living on eroding land to adjust themselves to a new economy where they can attain social and economic security for themselves and their children. This emphasis on land conservation rather than on the conservation of human resources has led us to ignore largely the human conservation problems in areas in which soil conservation problems are not acute.

Until rather recently we have ignored, except where soil depletion was a factor, the social and economic insecurity of the farmers in regions in which a one-crop system of agriculture--usually cotton or tobacco--has developed. In contrast to general farming, one-crop farming is characterized by its demand for seasonal hand labor which can be performed by poorly trained people. In the cotton and tobacco fields have evolved the cotton tenant, the sharecropper, and the farm laborer. As the crop share and the wage rate are low and the work season limited, there has evolved a quasi-feudal system in which the mass of the farmers are dependent upon and subservient to the landowners. Low and insecure levels of living, illiteracy, superstition, resentment, malnutrition, and disease are the rule. The long seasons of unemployment, with the attendant economic uncertainty, result in a dissatisfaction with the present and a marked fear of the future among sharecroppers, laborers, and the less thrifty renters. The primary concern of those in the ascendency is usually the immediate profits to be derived from the land, rather than its conservation or the well-being of the people who work it.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Lowlands of Southeast Missouri are an example of the conditions previously cited. Its soils are mostly of moderate to high productivity, and are adapted to the growing of a wide variety of crops. The growing season is long, averaging 188 days, and the rainfall is generous and distributed throughout the year. The long growing season and adequate rainfall encourage the growing of cotton. The fertile soils produce abundant crops but the level of living of the people who till the soil is lower than that of families living in the slum districts of our large American cities.

At one time the Lowlands had a rich natural resource in its virgin timber. In about two decades this resource was almost completely exploited. Lumber companies came into the territory between 1890 and 1910, stripped the timber and disposed of the land as quickly as possible. Large numbers of families brought in for timber work found themselves stranded without a means of livelihood and suffered the accompanying destruction of fundamental values in family life. At the present time agriculture is about the only industry in the area. The few small commercial industries which exist are engaged in the processing of the cotton crop.

The principal physical problem of the area is that of floods and drainage. The land is extremely level and formerly was subject to constant overflow from the principal rivers. Although levees have been built along the rivers and most of the area has been incorporated in drainage districts, the danger from high water still exists and much of the land is flooded because of the slow run-off during heavy rains.

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

The rapid expansion of agriculture resulted in an equally rapid increase in population. Although fur-trading posts were established in the early part of the eighteenth century and farming began before 1800, settlement was slow before 1900. A series of earthquakes in 1811 and 1812 and the effects of the guerilla warfare during the Civil War were partly responsible for the slow development; the swampy character of the land hindered settlement. After 1900, however, the population increase was rapid. From 1900 to 1930 the total population increased 75 per cent. The majority of the population in the territory is on farms. In 1930, 61 per cent of the total population was rural-farm, as compared with only 31 per cent in the State of Missouri.

The farm population of the area is characterized by a high proportion of native born people, large numbers of Negroes, large families, high fertility, a high ratio of males to females, a large proportion of the families normal families, a high rate of illiteracy, malnutrition, high mortality and morbidity rates, and a lack of social participation. The people who migrated to this area during the era of rapid settlement came largely from Arkansas, Tennessee, and Mississippi. They included large numbers from the sharecropper class. Many were Negroes; two-thirds of the Negro farm population in Missouri is found in these seven counties. In the migration, the old people, the broken families, ~~and the~~ unmarried females were left behind. Outstanding is the lack of formal education. The rate of illiteracy is 8.5 per cent as compared with 2.9 per cent in the State. The average education of the heads of the families is only 5.5 grades. The Negroes have an average schooling of only 2.6 grades. In the raising of cotton, where women and children work alongside the men, the youthful population provides a bountiful labor supply. The lack of training of the people makes them more susceptible to exploitation.

There is very little stability of residence within the area. The white sharecroppers and farm laborers and the Negroes move constantly from place to place in the hope of bettering their fortunes. As reported by the Census of Agriculture in 1935, 43 per cent of the tenants -- including sharecroppers but not farm laborers-- had been on their present farms less than one year. Among 903 white families interviewed by the authors in 1936, 2 per cent of the owners, 23 per cent of the renters, 34 per cent of the sharecroppers, and 44 per cent of the farm laborers had changed residence at the rate of two or more times in five years. This high rate of mobility affects adversely the entire social structure of the area. Its devastating effects are particularly marked upon children in relation to school and church. Being "on the move" becomes a part of their pattern of life with frequent changes of residence from one community to another the rule, rather than the exception.

In the Missouri Lowlands there has developed a stereotyped system of attitudes which reflects the status of sociability, good will, tolerance, and sense of justice. Here is to be found the equivalent of a caste system with the landowners on the upper level and white-renters, sharecroppers, laborers, and Negroes on a consecutive descending scale status. This differentiation in status dominates the activities and relationships of every-day life and determines the institutions and services which are available to the several groups. The lower income groups are at a distinct disadvantage in such things as rights in contract, the facilities in health service, in housing, in education, and in their rights before the law. The system appears to have consigned certain groups to a level of existence almost as low as that of serfs of other days.

The story of the plight of these people is pathetically told in their level of living. One-half of the white owner-operators queried by the authors in 1936 had a gross income of less than $1,269 in 1935, and one-half of the white renters less than $854. For white sharecroppers the figure was $415, with $264 for white farm laborers. Negroes of all tenure groups had an average gross income of only $251. Although the gross income does not include the value of the dwelling nor the value of the products produced and consumed on the farm, it is obvious from the figures given above that at least one-half of the families do not have sufficient cash income to maintain a decent standard of living. The actual income of the sharecropper is even less than represented here, because of the system of advances used. The sharecropper contracts with the landlord in the spring for "furnish" to make a crop. Having no capital of his own, the sharecropper begins immediately to receive advances from his landlord in the form of cash or merchandise or the establishment of a credit account at a merchant store. When the cotton is picked there is a settlement in which the landlord charges a flat rate of interest on the total amount of the advances. No statistical evidence is available on the rate of interest in this area, but there is reason to believe that it is not less than the 10 per cent or more which is charged in many sections of the older Cotton South. The landlord keeps the books, and the tenant is often too ignorant, or, particularly in the case of the Negro, afraid to question the accounts.

The houses in which the white sharecroppers and farm laborers and the Negroes live are crude shacks. The typical house in the area is a "box house" boarded up and down with narrow stripping over the cracks to keep out the weather. Single floors of rough lumber with many cracks are the rule. The roof is frequently of the "dry weather" type. Inside walls are covered with building paper, cardboard or newspapers or are bare. The exterior is unpainted. Such is the home environment of some 20,000 cropper and laborer families.

The white sharecroppers and farm laborers and the Negroes have few of this world's possessions. Household equipment is meager and inadequate. Such "luxuries" as washing machines, carpet sweepers, and rugs are almost unknown. While 40 per cent of the owner-operators and 26 per cent of the tenants have radios, only 10 per cent of the sharecroppers and 3 per cent of the farm laborers have them. The percentage for automobiles are 44, 25, 9 and 5 respectively.

The diets of the white sharecroppers and farm laborers and the Negroes are meager and ill-balanced with malnutrition and disease, especially in children, everywhere in evidence. Hot breads -- usually biscuits or corn pone -- dried beans, macaroni, salt pork, and molasses are the standard foods. Gardens are lacking or inadequate and are usually discouraged by the landlord; the cotton patch surrounds the house and even if there is a garden it will not begin to supply the family needs. Fruits, cereals, milk, and eggs are absent from the average diet. One-half of the sharecroppers and four-fifths of the farm laborers do not have cows, and two-fifths of the farm laborers do not have chickens. Such a condition on some of the best land in the Middle West is almost unbelievable.

The typical housing and the average diet largely explain the tragic health conditions of the people. The mortality rates for preventable diseases are exceedingly high. The rate for malaria is higher in every county in the lowlands than for the State as a whole and in some years has been as much as twenty times the State rate. Typhoid rates range up to nine times the State rate. The pulmonary tuberculosis rates are often double the State rate. The death rate from pneumonia is often higher than in the State as a whole. The mortality rates for diarrhea and enteritis among children under two years have been as high as eighteen times the State rate. The infant mortality rate in 1934 ranged from 75 deaths under one year per 1,000 live births in Scott County to 158 per 1,000 in New Madrid, as compared with the State rate of 62 per 1,000. A visit by a physician must usually be preceded by a guarantee of the fee by the landlord. Thus illness in all age groups often lingers on until it is too late.

The relief load is heaviest among white sharecroppers and farm laborers. Before Negroes receive relief in the area, they must be in much more desperate straits than the whites. Some of the landlords in the area have been relieved of the load of providing subsistence to their tenants by the governmental agencies providing relief. In the winter months after the cotton is picked the relief load rises; in the spring after cotton chopping begins the load declines. The substitution of farm laborers for sharecroppers was perhaps aided by the emergence of government relief. This instability affecting every member of the family appears to be a by-product of the tenure system.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The social institutions are functioning indifferently so far as the needs of the white sharecroppers and farm laborers and the Negroes are concerned. Custom and lack of transportation facilities leaves them stranded. The system of public education is characterized by gross inequalities of opportunity as among classes with marked unequal opportunities for Negroes. Negro schools are maintained separately from the white schools and are distinctly inferior.

Schools

A considerable proportion of the children of high school age do not live in districts with high schools. The necessity for having to arrange with other districts for high school training discourages many of the children from attending. Of 572 eighth grade graduates in the rural districts in the spring of 1934, only 332 entered high school in the autumn. The administration of compulsory attendance lags when applied to the low income groups where non-attendance is frequently encouraged by parents.

The school system in this area is a multiplicity of one-room school districts, with poorly trained and low-paid teachers. The buildings and grounds are below standard, the library facilities are limited, and attendance even with a split term for "cotton vacation" is most irregular. Only 24 schools out of over 400 rural districts are approved by the State Department of Education as being up to the standard set for elementary schools. Such a situation makes it imperative that the school systems be organized upon some basis of taxation that will provide ample funds for better school buildings, more adequate equipment, and properly trained teachers. If the experience of other middle-western states such as Indiana is indicative, this will necessitate state wide system of school taxation based upon ability to pay, and a system of apportioning school funds based upon the need for school facilities. The establishment of more and better high schools and a means of bringing the rural pupils to these would do much to disburden this area of the illiteracy and ignorance that is consigning the large mass of its people to a life of insecurity and poverty.

Adult Education

Of equal importance is the program for the education of the adult population. The extension centers at our state colleges with their County Agricultural Agents were organized to provide a link between the great wealth of knowledge accumulated by research agencies and the rural farm family. Much progress has been made by the Agricultural Extension Service but it has been unable to reach, to any great extent, families of the sharecropper and farm laborer groups. The value of the Extension Services and similar organizations for a program of education of the under-privileged farm family needs to be recognized and their programs modified and

expanded. In order to reach the lower income groups in areas such as Southeast Missouri, and bring about a fundamental readjustment of human resources to natural resources which will enable the majority of the farm families to attain a level of living and security which meets standards of minimum adequacy, it will be necessary for the Agricultural Extension Service and similar organizations to expand their programs far beyond the scope now possible with present funds and the number and type of field personnel available. In establishing the type of program needed, it must be recognized that the social problems of areas such as Southeast Missouri are matters of more than local concern, and the program planned and executed in terms of a State and National policy.

Recreational and Special Interest Groups

While women's clubs, civic clubs, lodges, farm organization, and boys' and girls' clubs are found in abundance both in variety and numbers, their membership does not include the great mass of white sharecroppers and farm laborers, and Negroes. Public recreational facilities are limited, and the more desirable forms of commercial recreation are not available to the low income groups. Thus these people are left to their own devices and live in the midst of a dullness of life which is deadening. The failure of organized activities to reach these groups has led to the emergence of the night club or road house in rural areas, which with its dance hall, bar, gambling rooms, and other diversions caters to Negroes and white farm laborers and sharecroppers.

Churches

The established churches of the area are reaching only a small proportion of the farm people. A large number of newer, less stabilized religious organizations have sprung into existence to serve the needs of the white sharecroppers and farm laborers and the Negroes, and are conducted on their cultural level. With the crudest edifices serving as churches and with untrained and often illiterate preachers, these sporadic sects are indulging in an emotional type of religion. Their appeal is often that of prejudice and emotion in relation to such factors as education, health, and improved agricultural practices.

In this area of low standards of living and insecurity there is placed an unusually large burden upon the social institutions. The prevalence of emotional religious groups of a temporary nature, together with part-time and irregular services among the established churches, and the rapid development of roadhouses with their cheap entertainment and gambling devices is sufficient evidence that the established social organizations are not meeting the needs of these people. Because facilities for transportation are poor and lacking, and because most of the energy of the great mass of people is consumed in making a mere subsistence, their community life must be meager. Recognition by institutionalized organizations, such as the

church, of the need for more vital, more constructive and more extensive programs which will interest, and which will be carried to, the great mass of the people, should do much in alleviating the prejudice, resentment, and superstition of this area.

BASIC ELEMENTS OF A DECADENT AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM

The social and economic problems of Southeast Missouri are the result of a complex of inter-relationships. Chief among these are the rapid development of cotton farming, the high incidence of concentrated, corporate and speculative landholdings, and the types of tenancy prevailing. No simple and easily found solution can be expected. Nor can the present landowners be expected to bear the burden of correcting a situation that has been accumulating since the development of the "colonial" agriculture of the South. The early agricultural system was based upon slavery and instituted by the English country squire for the benefit of the mother country. Only through the intervention of State and National agencies can we hope to change a system which has developed as a result of the land policies initiated by the English in their early settlement of the country, and perpetuated by one hundred and fifty years of development through the policy, or lack of policy, of the Federal government.

Farms of the Lowlands in 1935 were operated by 6,000 owners and 27,000 tenants, sharecroppers and laborers. In two counties almost 90 per cent of the farmers were tenants, and in a third county more than 80 per cent. The tenants may be classified into three groups: (1) renters, who own their own workstock and equipment and pay either cash or crop rent; (2) croppers, who furnish only their labor and receive a share of the crop-- usually one-half of the cotton-- in return; and (3) day laborers, who furnish only their labor and receive a cash wage. These types of tenants all prevail in the cotton-growing Old South. In Southeast Missouri, however, an unusually high proportion of the farm families are wage day laborers. Landowners are in some cases owner-operators of small acreages, but many large tracts are held by individual owners who are landlords only or are held by corporations.

The struggle for existence by the resident landowner on the one hand and the sharecroppers and farm laborers on the other hand led to mutual distrust. The tenants charge that the landowners are unfair, and the landlords charge that the tenants are shiftless and worth no more than the wages they receive. The leasing agreements between the landowners and the tenants are often unsympathetic bargains on the part of both parties. This has resulted in a general lack of provisions supported by good will and cooperation, provisions which add materially to the benefits accruing to both parties. Both the tenant and the landowner are correct in their charges to the extent that neither are receiving the full benefits which might result from their contractual relationship.

Wide fluctuations in the prices of cotton, and the heavy drainage and labor cost involved in producing it make the present one-crop system of farming hazardous for both the owner and the tenant farmer. The value that has been placed on land is out of proportion to the income that can be derived from it under a system of farming which will conserve the land and enable the men who till the soil to maintain an adequate standard of living. The inflated land values have resulted in a heavy mortgage debt load which has forced the landowners to perpetuate the one-crop system of farming which exploits both the land and the families who till it. As long as the fertility of the soil is such that one can continue to get high returns per acre through the use of a soil depleting system of agriculture and through the exploitation of cheap labor, cotton farming offers the landowner the best opportunity to remain solvent. Changing to a system of agriculture which will maintain the fertility of the soil and permit the payment of living wages would require one to increase his mortgage burden and probably bankrupt himself. Any change in the system of agriculture would involve a complete re-education of the tenants and laborers before they could operate it, or the substitution of other tenants familiar with a more general type of farming.

The situation described previously explains much of what appears to be wanton exploitation of tenants and laborers by resident landowners. However, large acreages of land in this area are owned by corporate absentee landlords who are receiving a high rate of return on their investment by the deliberate exploitation of the land and the people without assuming any social responsibility for the effect of this exploitation upon the people who expect to continue to work and live in Southeast Missouri. The situation described, both with respect to the resident landowner and the absentee exploiter is a vicious circle destroying both land and the people. It is now beyond possible control by the people of Southeast Missouri and if it is to be corrected, State or Federal action supported by adequate legislation will be necessary. It is sufficient to point out that, if no other means are at hand, sufficient penalties should be inflicted through legislation to discourage the speculative holding and selling of land.

Inasmuch as the system of land tenure is basically at fault in the maladjustment of the area, the modification of this system is basic to reform. Until the system of tenure is stabilized and until the tenant is permitted to share in the rich resources of the area, raising his level of living is impossible. It would appear that the system of tenure cannot be stabilized without a change of ownership. Ownership by the operators themselves or ownership by some governmental agency are the possible alternatives. Any type of tenure which is established must be supported by intensive supervision of farm practices and guidance in the problems of home management and the handling of finances. The great proportion of the white sharecroppers and farm laborers and the Negroes are deficient in education and managerial ability and it will be necessary to assist them through an educative process before they can be expected to handle their own farms. This can take the form of State and Federal

assistance in the development of more equitable leasing arrangements. Their advantages could be demonstrated through projects in which the Federal government would purchase and develop farm land under a system of agriculture which would conserve the land and enable the people who work it to maintain an adequate plane of living.

An alternative to an educational and demonstrational program in types of leasing and types of farming suitable to the area, and legislation to control land speculation is governmental control of land use either through regulation of the crops which may be grown or complete nationalization of land resources. The latter offers many difficulties owing to our land policy of past years which has assumed that land is a chattel which may be bought, sold or destroyed by the individual without hindrance by his neighbor or the State.

These or similar measures must be taken if the population is to receive the benefits of the rich, fertile soil on which they reside. Progress will of necessity be slow, and perhaps the children of the present generation will be the principal beneficiaries of such a program. With stability of tenure and larger incomes established, it will be possible to aid in the solution of other problems of these rural families. The necessary improvements include, among others, control of disease, raising of housing standards, reorganization of the school system, and the introduction of such adult social and educational facilities as will afford a rational and satisfying stimulus outlet for all groups.

The farm land in Southeastern Missouri is rich in agricultural resources, yet is populated with a submerged people. They are untrained in farm and home management and are without adequate systems of social institutions, an example of a condition which has developed under our "frontier" land policy. The paradox, of rich land and poor people, is a direct challenge to established State and Federal agencies designed to promote a better rural life.

CHAPTER II

NATURAL RESOURCES

Southeast Missouri is a distinct region of Missouri because it is part of the Mississippi Delta. The area was favored with rich natural resources. The mild climate, the level topography, and the natural fertility of the soil, particularly favorable to agriculture, still remain. One of the principal resources, however, the vast expanse of virgin timber, has been depleted and is gone.

PHYSICAL FEATURES

The region is a very pronounced physiographic area. It is the northern extremity of a vast lowland region extending through Arkansas and Louisiana to the Gulf of Mexico along the Mississippi River. In Missouri, the boundaries of the region are clearly defined. It is set off from the Ozark region on the northwest by a distinct bluff line, which extends from Cape Girardeau southwestward to the state line in southwestern Ripley County.

The region as a whole is a broad flat plain sloping to the south. With very few exceptions, the surface variations are not more than ten feet. Two prominent topographic features are Crowley's Ridge and Commerce Hills, remnants of an old upland which stood 20 to 165 feet above the general plain. The east and north slopes of these ridges are abrupt, but to the west, they grade off imperceptibly into the lowland. Crowley's Ridge varies in width from one to fifteen miles with its widest end in the north. Both Crowley's Ridge and Commerce Hills are completely dissected and in general surface features resemble the Ozarks to the north. Sikeston Ridge is a low, flat, inconspicuous ridge starting at an elevation of about 25 feet above the adjoining bottoms and extending from Commerce Hills southward to New Madrid.

The average altitude of the area is between 300 and 350 feet, the higher area occurring in the northern part. The climate is variable with a considerable range of temperature between summer and winter. The average date of the last killing frost in the spring is April 22, and the first killing frost in fall, October 18, giving an average growing season of 188 days. The average annual precipitation is about forty-eight inches, which is fairly well distributed throughout the year, the heaviest rainfall occurring in spring and early summer and the lightest in late fall and winter.

The soils in the area are mostly of moderate to high fertility. With the exception of small acreages on the northwestern border, the soils are all of alluvial origin. While they were all formed by stream action, they differ considerably in physical properties and in age. Some six types are distinguishable in the area.

TABLE 1. CLASSIFICATION OF SOIL AREAS IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI

	Per Cent
Soils Definitely Suited to Continued Crop Use	14.2
Soils of Moderate Fertility but Occasional Areas of Which Should be Retired from Crop Use	63.1
Soils Now Used for Crops but Much of Which Should Apparently be Retired from Such Use	19.6
Soils Definitely Submarginal for Crops	3.1
	100.0

Source: Adapted from Missouri Land Use Planning Section, Land Utilization Division, Resettlement Administration, "A Report on Current and Recent Land Occupancy with Particular Reference to Land Use, June 30, 1936."

The most productive soils are the Lintonia loam and the Sarpy fine sandy loam. The Lintonia loam, which is not very extensive, is a grayish brown silt loam. The Sarpy fine sandy loam, brown in color, is represented by the frontal land along the Mississippi River in the southern part of the area. Cotton is the most important crop on this soil, but corn, wheat, cowpeas, melons, sunflowers, peanuts, and sweet potatoes are grown successfully.

Next in fertility are the Sharkey clay loam, Lintonia fine sandy loam, and Waverly fine sandy loam. The Sharkey clay loam is the most extensive soil type in the area. It is a heavy, dark soil which is productive but difficult to cultivate. It is used most extensively for corn production, although as a grass soil it is superior to any of the lowland types. The Lintonia fine sandy loam is second only to the Sharkey clay loam in extent. It is light brown in color, and, except for small areas which are subject to blowing and drifting, is quite productive. Cotton is by far the most important crop grown on this soil at the present time, although many other crops can be successfully grown. The Waverly fine sandy loam is fairly extensive. It is grayish brown in color, and is a good agricultural soil.

The Waverly silt loam is the least productive of the alluvial soils in Southeast Missouri. In extent it is exceeded only by the Sharkey clay loam and the Lintonia fine sandy loam. It is distinguished by its light color, silty texture, and smaller timber. A terrace

soil of local origin, it dries readily and tends to bake and become hard. Since it is so thoroughly leached, it also has a tendency to an acid condition. In years of normal rainfall, fair to good returns are obtained from corn and wheat; but in wet seasons the yields are low.

The mild climate and generous rainfall in Southeast Missouri has encouraged the raising of cotton. On the fertile soils large and quick profits are possible. The physical features of the area are favorable to the exploitation of land and people through the production of a single crop with cheap labor.

DRAINAGE

The level topography of the land is responsible for a serious problem of drainage in the area. Lying in the lowlands along the Mississippi and St. Francis Rivers, the territory has been subject to overflow. When settlers first came to the area, it consisted largely of swamps, and settlement was greatly retarded until levees and drainage districts were built. In 1893 the state legislature created the St. Francois Levee District which took the first effective steps to construct a levee along the Mississippi River. The Federal Government and the District now maintain levees along the River through almost the full length of the territory, which adequately guard against overflow. The breaks in these levees are rare. Such overflows as occur are primarily due to numerous small streams and rivers flowing from the eastern slope of the Ozark hills. Since the fall or slope is much less in the lowlands than in the territory to the north, the water received does not flow south as rapidly as it enters, and the overflow is the result. This is one of the chief factors in the serious health conditions of the people.

The extent to which the drainage problem exists is brought out by the fact that nearly 70 per cent of the total land area is now within organized drainage districts. The first of these in the territory were established before 1900, but the peak of the development came in the first fifteen years of the present century. Hundreds of miles of ditches, levees, and dikes were constructed by the districts, and thousands of acres were reclaimed for agricultural use.

The area, however, is still far from adequately drained, and agriculture is somewhat of a gamble. In years of normal rainfall, the fertile soil provides rich returns. A wet season, on the other hand, will result in partial crop failure. The problem of financing the drainage districts also creates instability in the area. The drainage taxes are high, to the amount of $3.00 per acre in some instances. During the period of low agricultural prices, many of the districts were in serious financial distress. The high taxes have contributed in many instances to the foreclosure of mortgages on farms, the ownership of which was transferred to insurance companies

TABLE 2. CONDITIONS OF LAND BEFORE AND AFTER DRAINAGE IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI

	Acres		Per Cent	
	Prior to Drainage	1930	Prior to Drainage	1930
Land Unfit to Raise Any Crop	1,301,071	42,320	71.4	2.3
Land Fit to Raise Partial Crop	205,969	162,284	11.3	8.9
Land Fit to Raise Normal Crop	315,570	1,618,006	17.3	88.8
Total	1,822,610	1,822,610	100.0	100.0

Source: Fifteenth United States Census

and other large landholders. This means an absentee landlord system with its customary hazards to the renter, sharecropper, and laborer.

The flood and overflow perils introduce an element of special risk into agriculture. The high costs of drainage create financial instability, which enlarges the opportunity for the operations of speculators. It also increases the amount of the returns from agriculture which must go to the landlord or owner. This tends to reduce the crop share and the daily wage of the worker.

LAND UTILIZATION AND INDUSTRIES

By far the most important resource of the Lowlands is its agriculture. The total land area of the seven counties in 1935 was approximately 2,549,760 acres. Of this 1,776,362 acres, or 69.7 per cent, were in farms. Of the remaining 773,398 acres, the great majority was still in timber or in swamps. Much of the northern half of Butler County is in the Wapapello Federal Forest Preserve. Some of the land, of course, is in incorporated places, in roads, and in drainage ditches. Recreational areas -- parks, playgrounds, lakes, bayous, resorts -- constitute a small portion of the land not in farms.

Until the last twenty-five years, much of the land was in forest and woodland, and for a time lumbering was an important industry. The timber resources consisted chiefly of oak, maple, sycamore, poplar, cypress, gum, ash, walnut, hickory, pecan, and cottonwood. Beginning about 1890, a number of lumber companies came into the area and the virgin timber was rapidly exhausted. Today, only one tract of virgin timber remains; in southern Mississippi County, a tract of several thousand acres has been in litigation and has not been cut over. Much clearing of new land is taking place at the present time but the major part of the sawing is done by small mills. Many are of a portable tractor power type, which clearly indicates the near demise of this industry. The logging is done chiefly in the winter months when farmers are not busy with their crop. Many of the mills are in operation only a few months of the year to saw up scrub timber

for fuel. The only two mills of any importance ship logs from a considerable distance and have expanded their operations to include the manufacturing of such items as mop and broom handles, furniture parts, and radio cabinets. Stave and cross tie industries, the "gleaning" forces of the lumber industry, are becoming scarce for want of bolt and tie timber. Even wood for fuel may be exhausted in the rather near future.

Only a comparatively small amount of land is utilized for the extraction of minerals and the development of manufacturing industries. The only mineral activity now is a pottery near Bloomfield in Stoddard County. It is a family affair employing only four or five men. The clay for the pottery is found in a twelve mile radius of the plant which is located midway between Dexter and Bloomfield. In Northern Butler County are a few abandoned iron ore mines. The limited industrial life is found almost directly connected with the soil and consists of the primary processing of agriculture products. Secondary processing or that indirectly connected with the soil consists of 1 cotton oil mill, 1 shoe factory, 1 loading dock, 2 clothing mills, 1 knitting mill, and 1 cabinet shop. The primary processing plants include 111 cotton gins, 3 cotton compresses, 22 elevators, 38 grist mills, 5 flour mills, a recently installed alfalfa mill in Mississippi County, a vinegar plant in northern Stoddard County, and a handle mill for making hickory handles for all kinds of striking tools, also in Stoddard County.

The development of lumbering brought a population of woodsmen who were left stranded when the task was done. They have taken to agriculture in a very halfhearted manner and are found chiefly in the ranks of the sharecroppers and farm laborers. They are the residue of the lumbering industry and find adjustments difficult.

CHAPTER III

THE SETTLEMENT OF SOUTHEAST MISSOURI AND THE COMPOSITION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ITS POPULATION

Southeast Missouri was a belated frontier in the settlement of America. The increase in the population was small before 1900. In the present century, however, the expansion of the area was very rapid. The migration into the territory was highly selective, which affected the composition of the population. The great bulk of the immigrants came from Arkansas, Tennessee, and Mississippi, where they were cotton tenants. A large proportion are Negroes. A majority of the people are on farms, the families are large, and many individuals are illiterate or lacking in formal education. They form a bountiful supply of cheap labor, which results in a low wage scale and correspondingly low levels of living in which the family is reduced to a basis of a bare existence and the necessities of life.

THE SETTLEMENT OF THE AREA

Settlement began in Southeast Missouri at an early date. In 1682 LaSalle took possession of all the Mississippi territory as far south as the Gulf of Mexico and called it Louisiani in honor of the King of France. The French who came to Missouri were interested in mines, pelts, and other valuables and their settlements remained chiefly along the banks of the rivers. It was the American Colonials from Virginia, North Carolina, and Kentucky in search of rich land who became the real pioneers of Southeast Missouri. They penetrated further inland than did the French and built permanent settlements.

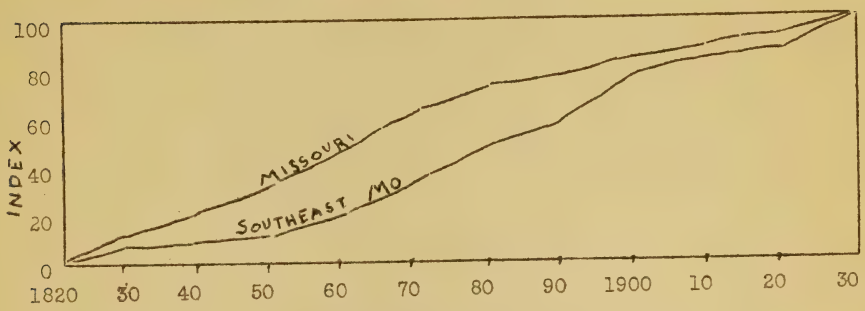
The settlement of the area proceeded slowly during the nineteenth century. In the early years, it is quite probably that settlement was delayed by earthquakes which occurred in 1811 and 1812. The greatest force was felt in what is now Pemiscot County but an area with a radius of 100 miles was affected. Much damage was done and many of the settlers, finding themselves homeless, fled from the area. During the Civil War the section was overrun by lawless men who harried the whole country, seizing property when and where they pleased. Many of the towns in the area were practically depopulated. The inhabitants were killed or driven from their homes. Considerable property was damaged. Homes were frequently burned; fields were destroyed; and fences were torn down. The livestock was often killed or driven away. Material losses were great and it took many years for the section to recover.

The construction of levees and drainage districts in the latter part of the nineteenth and the early part of the present centuries was followed by a rapid increase in population. Between 1890 and 1900 the rate of increase was two and one-half times that of the State; between 1900 and 1910 it was more than six times as great; by 1920 the rate of increase had dropped to 12.9 per cent, which was approxi-

mately four times the State rate; and in 1930 it was not quite twice as large as the State rate of 6.6 per cent.

FIGURE 1. INDEX OF POPULATION GROWTH IN MISSOURI AND IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1820-1930

(1930 - 100)



URBAN-RURAL POPULATION

By 1930 the Census reported 195,000 people in the seven counties in the area. Of this total population only 31,000, or 16 per cent, were in cities of 2,500 or more. The largest city in the area, Poplar Bluff in Butler County, has a population of only 7,551, and only one other city, Sikeston in Scott County, has a population of more than 5,000. New Madrid County does not have a single city of 2,500 or more and thus is entirely rural. Of the 164,000 rural inhabitants only 45,000 (23 per cent of the total population) are classified as rural non-farm. The remaining 119,000 inhabitants, or 61 per cent of the total population, live on farms. The proportion of the total population which is rural-farm varies from 39 per cent in Scott County to 71 per cent in Pemiscot County.

NATIONALITY AND RACE

While the French were among the first settlers no considerable number of immigrants have ever resided in the area. By 1930 the white population was almost entirely native of native parentage. Among the white persons living on farms only 249 were foreign-born in 1930, and only 1,771 were of foreign or mixed parentage.

Racially, however, the population is more complex. In 1935, there were 19,911 Negroes on farms in the area. More than two-thirds of the Negroes on farms in Missouri are found in these seven counties. While the proportion of Negroes in the farm population has always been larger here than in the State as a whole, there was a wave of

migration of Negroes to the area after 1920. Lured by the development of cotton, they came in large numbers from Arkansas, Tennessee, and Mississippi. Many were imported by landlords who went to the states south of Missouri after them. When the growing of cotton declined after 1925, the tide of Negro migration reversed its direction, and many of them emigrated. This was particularly true in

TABLE 3. NEGRO FARM POPULATION IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1935, BY COUNTIES

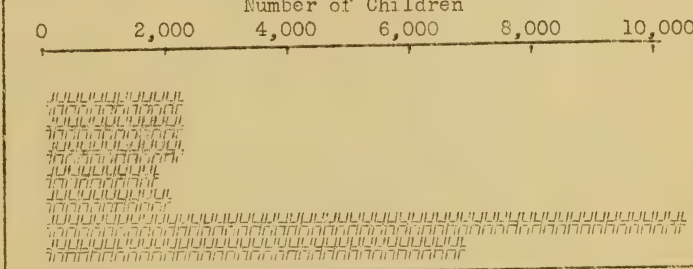
Butler	729
Dunklin	413
Mississippi	4,102
New Madrid	4,777
Pemiscot	7,341
Scott	1,191
Stoddard	1,358
Total	19,911
Missouri	28,855

Source: United States Census of Agriculture, 1935

Scott and New Madrid Counties. Nevertheless, most of the increase in the rural population from 1920 to 1930 occurred among the Negroes; while the white rural population was increasing 3,183, the Negro rural population increased by 15,267.

There is considerable variation in the distribution of the Negroes throughout the area, with a concentration in the cotton-growing sections. Dunklin County, where there are few negroes, is the one

FIGURE 2. SCHOOL ENUMERATION OF NEGRO CHILDREN IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, BY FIVE YEAR INTERVALS, 1900-1930



Source: Eighty-third Report of the Public Schools of the State of Missouri, School Year Ending June 30, 1932.

notable exception to this. A considerable proportion of the whites in the County came from the hill sections of the South carrying an active antagonism toward Negroes which has discouraged Negro immigration.

There is also considerable variation in the distribution of the Negroes in the various farm tenure groups. Few of the Negroes are renters, more are owners, but the great majority are sharecroppers and day laborers.

TABLE 4. TYPES OF TENURE AMONG 1097 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES, BY COLOR

Tenure Group	Number		Per Cent	
	White	Negro	White	Negro
Owners	145	38	16.0	20.2
Renters	298	15	32.8	8.0
Croppers	181	56	19.9	29.8
Laborers	285	79	31.3	42.0
Total	909	188	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties.

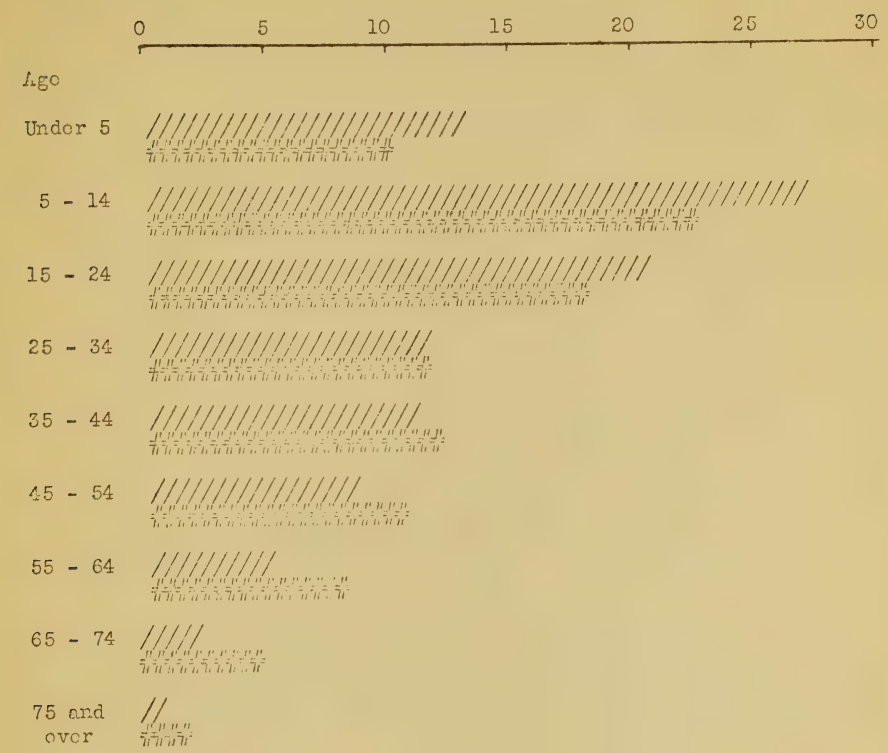
AGE DISTRIBUTION

Among the farm population, 61 per cent of the total are under 25 years of age, as contrasted to 50 per cent in the farm population of the State. Not only are the children more numerous, but the heads of the families are younger. The average age of the male heads of farm families in the State is 47.2 but among 1096 representative families in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties it is only 40.1.

Among the various tenure groups, there is considerable variation in the age distribution. Among the whites, there is a definite tendency for the age of the head to increase as one proceeds from day laborer to sharecropper, to renter, to owner. Among the Negroes this is not so pronounced. There is little difference between the average ages of negro day laborers, croppers and renters, though the Negro owners are somewhat older than the tenants.

In the migration to this area, there was a selective process which brought in the younger people, and left the older people behind. Such a population provided a unique opportunity for the establishment of a community which would be progressive and idealistic. Instead, tradition, suspicion, prejudice, and resentment prevail.

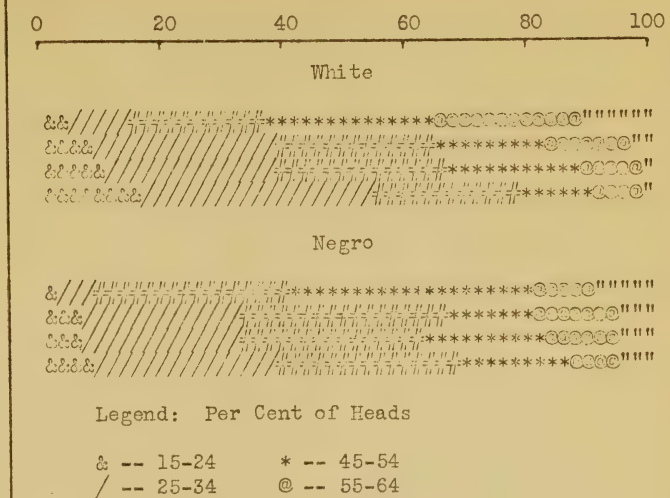
FIGURE 4. AGE DISTRIBUTION OF RURAL-FARM POPULATION IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI AND IN MISSOURI, 1930



Legend: / -- Southeast Missouri
// -- Missouri

Source: Fifteenth United States Census

FIGURE 5. AGE OF HEADS OF 1096 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES, BY COLOR AND TENURE GROUP



Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties.

FAMILIES

In 1930, there were 25,100 farm families in the Lowlands. The families are somewhat larger than in the State as a whole. The average size of family in every county in the area is larger than the average for the State. The large size of the families is partly the

TABLE 5. MEDIAN SIZE OF RURAL-FARM FAMILIES IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1930, BY COUNTIES

Butler	4.26
Dunklin	4.52
Mississippi	4.12
New Madrid	4.25
Pemiscot	3.86
Scott	4.56
Stoddard	4.29
Missouri	3.63

Source: Fifteenth United States Census

result of the high proportion of persons of childbearing age. Much of it, however, is attributable to the high fertility among the families. The ratio of the number of children under 5 years of age to the number of women 20-44 among the farm population for the counties in this area varies from 769 to 941 as compared with 657 for the State as a whole.

TABLE 6. NUMBER OF CHILDREN UNDER 5 YEARS OF AGE PER 1,000 WOMEN 20-44 YEARS OF AGE IN THE RURAL-FARM POPULATION OF SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1930, BY COUNTIES

Butler	941
Dunklin	932
Mississippi	840
New Madrid	922
Pemiscot	769
Scott	871
Stoddard	797
Missouri	657

Source: Special Tabulation from United States Bureau of Census

Concentration on a single cash crop (cotton) demands a large labor supply for only part of the year. Landlords prefer large families to meet the labor demands of the peak seasons and will give preference in selecting tenants to families with several able-bodied children, thus encouraging a high birth rate. The high birth rate in turn perpetuates the economic system. The rate of natural increase is considerably higher than the State average and higher among whites than Negroes. The lower rate of natural increase among Negroes may be attributed to a higher rate of mortality, especially infant mortality.

The formation of families in Southeast Missouri is somewhat affected by the high ratio of males to females in the area. In the State the sex ratio among the farm population 15 years or over is 115 males to 100 females. Because of the smaller opportunities for women on farms, they have migrated from the open country in larger proportions than men. In the Southeast males have provided a larger proportion of the migrants to the farms than females. With the exception of Dunklin County, the county ratios of males to females are larger than the ratio for the State as a whole. One effect of this large proportion of males is that there is a large number of men without family attachments. Another result is that girls marry very young.

TABLE 7. NUMBER OF MALES PER 100 FEMALES IN THE RURAL FARM POPULATION 15 YEARS OF AGE OR OVER OF SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1930, BY COUNTIES

Butler	122
Dunklin	113
Mississippi	124
New Madrid	122
Pemiscot	120
Scott	122
Stoddard	117
Southeast Missouri	119
Missouri	115

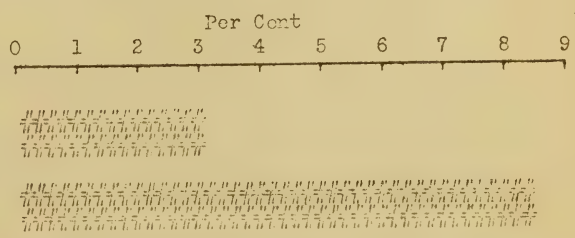
Source: Fifteenth United States Census

Of the households in the area, the normal family of husband and wife, or husband and wife and children, with or without non-family persons, is characteristic. The proportion of broken families is small, perhaps smaller than in most areas because of the unusually high proportion of young families.

SCHOOLING AND ILLITERACY

The amount of illiteracy among the people in Southeast Missouri is exceedingly high, and their educational attainments are correspondingly low. The proportion of the persons 10 years of age or older in the farm population who are illiterate is 8.5 per cent, as compared with 2.9 per cent in the State.

FIGURE 6. PER CENT OF RURAL-FARM POPULATION 10 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER ILLITERATE IN MISSOURI AND IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1930

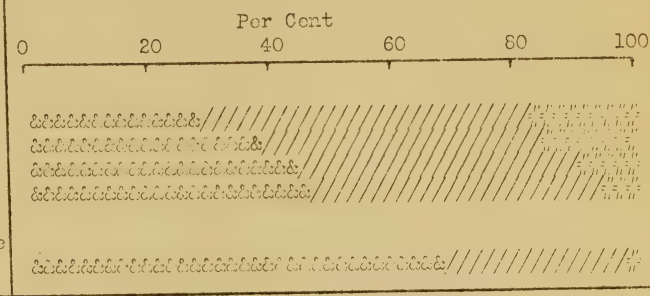


Source: Fifteenth United States Census

The illiteracy rate varies from 3.8 per cent in Butler County to 10.7 per cent in Pemiscot County.

Among heads of farm households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties the average number of grades completed is only 5.5. Among the negroes the average schooling is only 2.6 grades. Among the whites, the owners have completed an average of 7.3 grades, renters 6.3, croppers 5.6, and laborers 5.4.

FIGURE 7. EDUCATION OF HEADS OF 1094 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES, BY COLOR AND TENURE GROUP

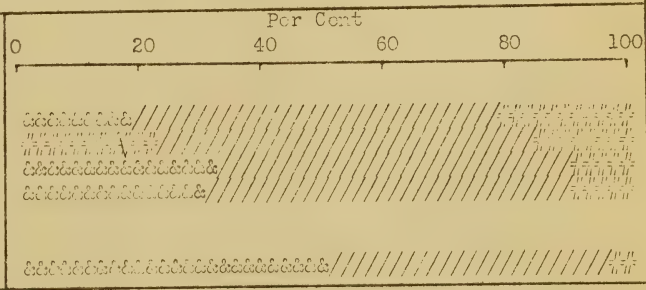


Legend: Per Cent Completing
& -- Four grades or less
/ -- Five to eight grades
-- Nine grades or more

Source: Survey of 1553 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid & Pemiscot Counties

The schooling of the wives is slightly greater than that of the husbands, averaging 6.6 grades. Among the Negro women the average is 5.1. White women in the households of owners average 8.0 grades, renters 7.2, croppers 6.4, and laborers 6.5.

FIGURE 8. EDUCATION OF HOMEMAKERS[1] OF 997 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES, BY COLOR AND TENURE GROUP



Legend: Per Cent Completing
& -- Four Grades or less
/ -- Five to eight grades
-- Nine grades or more

[1] Wife or paramour of male head.

Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid and Pemiscot Counties

Such a condition of illiteracy on some of the best land in the State must be charged to an attitude of neglect on the part of those responsible for public policy. It consigns many permantly to a low-income group where it is impossible to maintain any hope for improvement. Life becomes a drab ordeal with the only outlet found in excesses frequently antisocial.

CHAPTER IV

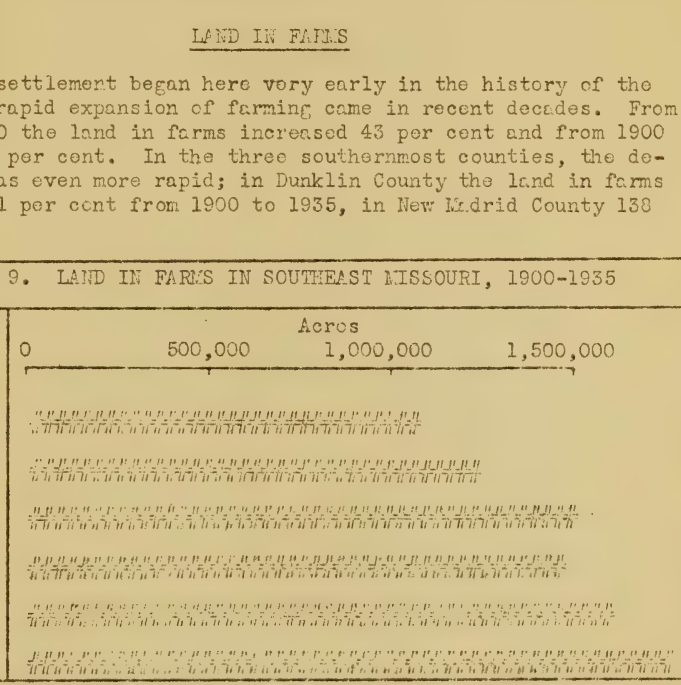
THE AGRICULTURE AND THE FARM TENURE SYSTEM

The large increase of population in Southeast Missouri since 1900 was the result of a rapid expansion of agriculture. In the period since the World War, cotton rapidly developed bringing with it the wide extension of cotton tenancy with its accompanying tragedy of a low standard of family living and a pathetic sense of insecurity described in previous chapters. The recent rapid expansion of farming also attracted a group of land speculators and corporate landowners whose interest was in quick profits and not in people. A farm tenure system which is very unstable and exploits both land and people was established.

LAND IN FARMS

While settlement began here very early in the history of the State, the rapid expansion of farming came in recent decades. From 1900 to 1920 the land in farms increased 43 per cent and from 1900 to 1935, 68 per cent. In the three southernmost counties, the development was even more rapid; in Dunklin County the land in farms increased 71 per cent from 1900 to 1935, in New Madrid County 138

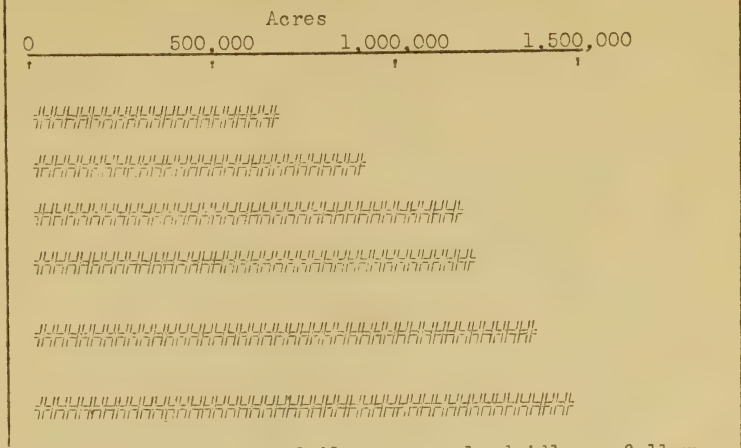
FIGURE 9. LAND IN FARMS IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1900-1935



Source: United States Census

per cent, and in Pemiscot County, 180 per cent. The increase in improved land in farms was even greater -- 78 per cent from 1900 to 1920.

FIGURE 10. IMPROVED LAND IN FARMS IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1899-1934

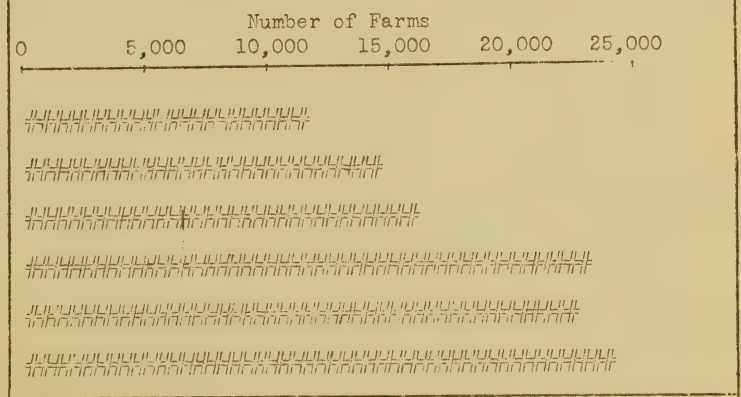


[1] Crop land harvested, crop failure, crop land idle or fallow, plowable pasture.

Source: United States Census

With the rapid increase in the amount of land in farms was a corresponding increase in the number of farms. While the number in the entire State of Missouri was actually declining from 1900 to 1925, in Southeast Missouri it nearly doubled. There are violent fluctuations in the number of farms in some counties as reported by the Census,

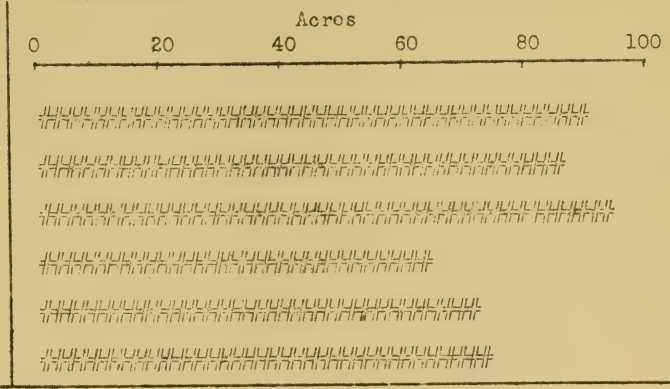
FIGURE 11. NUMBER OF FARMS IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1900-1935



Source: United States Census

which resulted from the development of new land and changes in type of farming and farm organization. These fluctuations appear more distinctly in the data for the average size of farm as reported by the Census.

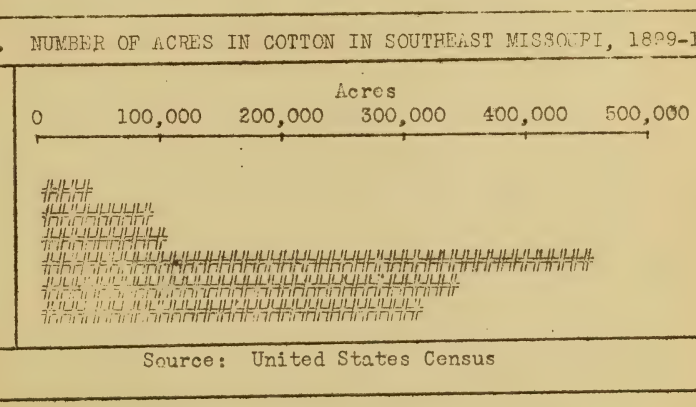
FIGURE 12. AVERAGE SIZE OF FARMS IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1900-1935



Source: United States Census

When new land was brought into cultivation, a considerable part was unimproved and the farms were large in order that adequate crop land might be available. About 1920, there was an enormous increase in the amount of cotton; farms were subdivided to provide for tenants. The number of farms as reported by the Census declined and the size of farms increased again when there was a retreat in the growing of cotton and when day laborers were substituted for tenants. The extraordinary growth of agriculture in these counties was accompanied

FIGURE 13. NUMBER OF ACRES IN COTTON IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1899-1934



Source: United States Census

by marked instability in the nature of farming operations with the accompanying lack of security to the laboring classes. The changes in type of farming and farm organizations came about without a corresponding development of institutions and services available to the working people which made an underprivileged class of the low-income groups.

TYPE OF FARMING

While Southeast Missouri is essentially a part of the cotton belt, it is at the edge of a general farming region. Here the cotton farming of the South and the grain and livestock and general farming of the North meet. In the northern counties of the area, Scott and Stoddard, cotton farming is less important than general farming; in Scott County it is also less important than cash-grain farming. In the middle tier of counties, Butler, Mississippi, and New Madrid, only 31, 51 and 57 per cent, respectively, of the farms are cotton farms. However, in the two southernmost counties, Dunklin and Pemiscot, cotton farming is almost exclusive.

For the area as a whole, cotton farms are numerically the leading type, followed by general farms. The latter are found extensively in Butler, Scott, and Stoddard Counties, but are not so frequent in the four southern counties. Cash-grain farms, which are third in number, are located particularly in western Scott, in western Mississippi, and in eastern New Madrid Counties. A considerable number of cash-grain farms are also found in Dunklin County, particularly along the eastern side of the sandy ridge, and in Stoddard County. There are many self-sufficing farms in Butler and Stoddard Counties. Crop-specialty, fruit, truck, dairy, animal-specialty, and poultry farms are found only in small numbers in the area.

TABLE 8. TYPES OF FARMS IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1930

Type of Farm	Number	Percent
Cotton	12,992	57.9
General	2,610	11.6
Cash-Grain	2,517	11.2
Self-sufficing	1,200	5.4
Animal-specialty	483	2.2
Abnormal	424	1.9
Crop-specialty	294	1.3
Dairy	205	.9
Poultry	82	.4
Fruit	26	.1
Truck	21	.1
Unclassified	1,564	7.0
Total	22,418	100.0

Source: Fifteenth United States Census.

The principal crops in 1934 were corn, cotton, wheat, and hay. The acreage in corn exceeds that of cotton. Corn is grown on almost all cotton farms, and, in addition, is grown extensively on general farms

TABLE 9. ACRES IN PRINCIPAL CROPS IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1934

	Acres
Corn	494,267
Cotton	307,601
All Hay	179,054
Wheat	107,818
All Others [1]	44,127
Total Crop Land Harvested	1,132,867

1 Difference Between Total Crop Land Harvested and Acreage of Four Principal Crops.

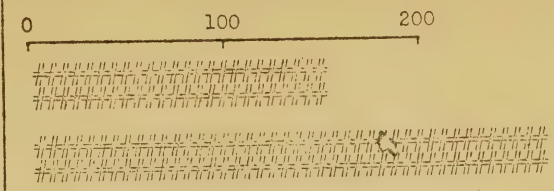
Source: United States Census of Agriculture: 1935

and animal-specialty farms to feed to livestock. Scott and Stoddard Counties are the two chief wheat-growing counties, although considerable wheat is grown in Mississippi and New Madrid Counties.

A wide variety of other crops is grown in small acreages. Oats, rye, barley, grain sorghum, Irish potatoes, and sweet potatoes are found throughout the area. Watermelons are extensively grown, though they are of declining importance because the persistent use and improper care of the soil have resulted in soil infection. The climate and soils of Southeast Missouri are adapted to the growing of a great variety of crops, but the development of cotton has fastened a one-crop system of farming on the more southern counties. Many of the food items which are lacking in the diets of most of the tenants could be readily grown, but the concentration on the growing of cotton has prevented their expansion.

Crop yields in the area range from average to high, as compared with yields for the State as a whole and for the United States. For the ten-year period 1921 to 1930, the average of the yearly yields of cotton ranged from 175 pounds in Butler County to 307 pounds per acre in Pemiscot County, as compared with 160 pounds for the United States as a whole. For corn the yields ranged from 21 bushels per acre for Butler County to 28 for Scott County, as compared with the yield of 26 bushels for Missouri and also for the United States. Wheat yields are slightly lower than for the State as a whole.

FIGURE 14. AVERAGE YIELD OF COTTON PER ACRE FOR THE UNITED STATES AND FOR SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1921-1930
(Average of Yearly Averages)



Source: United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Statistics, 1936; Missouri Farm Census, 1930

TABLE 10. AVERAGE YIELD PER ACRE OF COTTON AND CORN IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1920 - 1930, BY COUNTIES
(Average of Yearly Averages)

Area	Cotton (Pounds)	Corn (Bushels)
Butler	175	21
Dunklin	284	24
Mississippi	254	26
New Madrid	251	25
Pemiscot	307	27
Scott	254	28
Stoddard	213	24
State of Missouri	274	26
United States	160	26

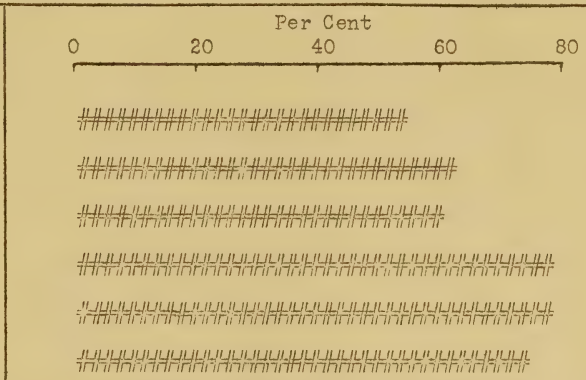
Source: United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Statistics, 1936; Missouri Farm Census, 1930; Missouri Farm Census, 1931.

FARM TENURE

The nature of land tenure is one of the most significant characteristics of the social and economic patterns of the Lowlands. Three chief elements enter into the system of farm tenure: (1) a very high rate of tenancy, (2) large landholdings by corporations and private individuals, and (3) an unusually large proportion of day wage laborers.

In 1935, 74 per cent of the farms were operated by tenants. In New Madrid and Mississippi Counties about 90 per cent of the farms were so operated and in Pemiscot County the percentage was more than 80. While tenancy has always been high in this area, a significant increase came in the period after 1920 when cotton expanded so rapidly. Today the rate is higher in this area than in much of the older cotton South.

FIGURE 15. PER CENT OF FARM TENANCY IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1900-1935



Source: United States Census

The high rate of tenancy is closely related to the type of land ownership. Large tracts of land are held by insurance companies, land development companies, and large individual landholders. Small holdings have been discouraged by the high drainage taxes. Land speculators from all parts of the United States have bought cut-over land at nominal prices and invested large sums of money in clearing the land and in drainage. Thousands of dollars have been borrowed from insurance companies and other agencies to develop the land. In the ups and downs of cotton prices, many of the farms have come into the possession of the creditors. At the present time, of the 1,800,000 acres in farms, 950,000 are owned by landholders, corporate and private, who own 200 acres or more each. Of these, at least 635,000 acres are owned by landholders who hold 500 acres or more each. And of these, at least 450,000 acres are held by owners of 1,000 acres or more each. Insurance companies alone own more than 200,000 acres of land in the seven counties; two insurance companies hold more than 40,000 acres each. Non-corporate individual holdings of 2-, 3-, and 4,000 acres are not unknown, and holdings of 500 to 2,000 acres are common.

While many of the corporate and the private landlords are interested in maintaining a stable agriculture of their holdings, a large group of landlords is interested only in speculative profits -- from the sale of the land or from the growing of cotton or both. This group of land speculators contributes materially to the social and economic instability of the area. An insight into the evils of the system of land tenure is provided by an analysis of the landlord-tenant relationship as it prevails.

In general, tenants on cotton farms in Southeast Missouri are of two more or less distinct types, customarily called sharecroppers and share or cash renters. There are very few cash renters operating cotton farms in this area and for purposes of this study renters -- whether share or cash -- have been classified as renters.

While share tenants and cash or standing rent tenants are common in more parts of the United States, the sharecropper -- commonly called cropper -- is found principally in the South. He occupies a tenure status between that of a wage hand and share tenant. The typical cropper is without workstock, equipment, or other capital. The landlord furnishes him everything, including subsistence goods or "furnish", rent, fuel, workstock and equipment, seed fertilizer, etc. Such advances are charged against the cropper's account and settlement is made when the crop is marketed. Only labor is furnished by the cropper and this labor is directed and supervised by the landlord to almost as great an extent as that of wage hands. The cropper, however, is paid a share of the crop at the end of the season in lieu of cash wages. This share usually amounts to one-half of the crop and his compensation is therefore somewhat closely related to his care of the crop.

The sharecropper occupies a somewhat less secure position than even the wage laborer because his return rests entirely upon the success of the crop which in turn is dependent upon climatic and other factors. Should a prolonged drought occur or the ravages of the boll weevel destroy the crop, the cropper has nothing to show for his labor and frequently is reduced to an economic status even lower than the laborer. The distinction then between croppers and laborers is merely one of degree and shifts can be made quite easily since the landlord owns all the workstock, equipment, and other production capital. Presumably the only change involved is in the method of paying for labor. Experience has proved the cropper system to be better adapted to certain conditions existing in the cotton area than either the share-tenant or wage-hand system. Under the wage system, the landlord assumes a somewhat greater risk, exercises a slightly greater amount of supervision, and perhaps has a slightly lower grade of labor.

Share and rent tenants usually furnish their own workstock, feed equipment, and other production capital. There is, however, a wide variation in the supervision of their operations. On cotton farms, they are supervised to a large extent, although not so fully as croppers or wage hands. Frequently the landlord advances "furnish" to the renters although this practice is not so general as in the case of croppers. The renter may give a fixed amount of cash or cotton or he may give a share of the crop for the use of the land.

The members of the wage laborer group occupy the lowest status in the economic system and receive only their wages in return for labor on the cotton farm. They work by the day and their wages are based on the amount of cotton they pick. The responsibility of the landlord to advance "furnish" to the laborer does not generally exist in the landlord-laborer relationship, but in a number of cases where the laborer has proved dependable and honest, subsistence is furnished. This practice seems to be typical of only a few cotton areas of the United States and does not exist in the states comprising the southeastern cotton belt. Landlords regard the usual laborer as too great a risk because of his constant shifting about from farm to farm and from one county to another. Certain perquisites such as fuel, living quarters, and sometimes a tract of land to be used for garden purposes are given by the landlord.

There are so many other possible combinations and modifications of the tenancy system that the relationships are often quite complicated. A tenant may rent from the owner and sub-rent to sharecroppers or he may own a farm but rent it out and work another farm on the share plan. A common arrangement found in Southeast Missouri is what is called the "third and fourth" plan whereby the landlord receives one-third of the cotton and one-fourth of the corn. This plan, however, is only operative for those tenants who own or can furnish their own workstock.

No data are available for the area as a whole as to the proportion of these various types of tenure classes, but among a representative sample of 914 families in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties 34 per cent were renters, 26 per cent were sharecroppers, and 40 per cent were laborers.

TABLE 11. TYPES OF TENURE AMONG 914 TENANTS IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES

	Number	Per Cent
Renters	313	34.3
Croppers	237	25.9
Laborers	364	39.8
Total	914	100.0

Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties.

The proportion of the farm population who are laborers is much greater in Southeast Missouri than it is in the older cotton areas. In the older cotton areas during the transition period after slavery, a farm tenure system was developed which exploited land and people through sharecropping. In Southeast Missouri there has been an acceleration of this practice through the use of day laborers. This

change to day labor relieves the landlord of the responsibility he formerly assumed for the sharecropper but it leaves the farm laborer's family at the mercy of chance which usually means that the family is on relief except in cotton chopping and picking time.

The social status and the level of living which accompanies this farm tenure system will be described in following chapters.

CHAPTER V

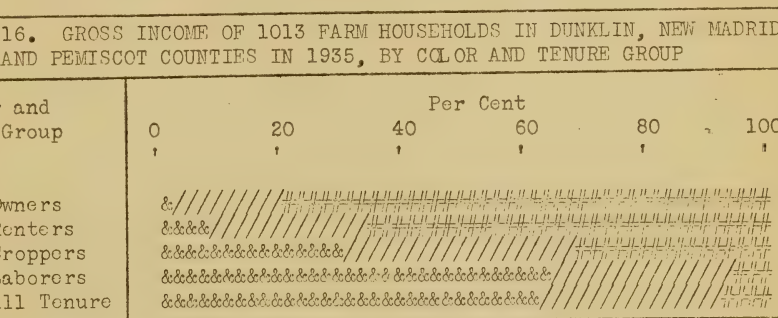
HOW THE PEOPLE LIVE

Sharecroppers and farm laborers make up the majority of the population but have little influence in determining the conditions under which they work and live. Their levels of living are best described in terms of low income, poor housing, lack of property, inadequate diet, poor health, excessive mobility, and the relief history of the mass of the people.

Much of the data included in this chapter was obtained by interviews with approximately 1500 families in Dunklin, Pemiscot, and New Madrid Counties during the spring and summer of 1936. Careful methods of sampling were used so that it is believed the conditions among the families interviewed are fairly representative of the conditions which prevail among all farm families in these three counties. Since Dunklin, Pemiscot, and New Madrid Counties have proportionately more cotton farms than the other four counties, these data are not fairly representative of the conditions which exist in the whole area; they do, however, portray conditions among approximately 6,000 farm families living in the cotton growing sections of Missouri. Similar conditions exist in the whole Mississippi Delta Section which includes some 200,000 rural farm families living in Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana, approximately 4 per cent of the rural farm population of the United States.

The incomes of the majority of the sharecroppers, laborers, and Negroes of all classes are too low to maintain a decent standard of living. Although one-half of the white farm owners had a gross income in 1935 of $1269, and one-half of the renters $854, the comparable figure for sharecroppers was only $415, for laborers only $264, and for Negroes of all classes only $251. The source of these in-

FIGURE 16. GROSS INCOME OF 1013 FARM HOUSEHOLDS IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES IN 1935, BY COLOR AND TENURE GROUP



Legend: Per Cent of Households Receiving
& -- Less than $300
/ -- $300 to $599
// -- $600 and over

Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties.

comes was largely the value of the individual's share of the cotton crop or the wages received. However, the value of the crops sold, the value of livestock, poultry produce, and dairy produce sold, pensions, income from roomers and boarders, cash income from real estate and investments, A. A. A. benefit checks, direct relief, and miscellaneous types of income are included. The value of products consumed on the farm is not included, but for the sharecropper and laborer, this is very small.

Out of their gross income the owners and renters must pay certain farm expenses, including wages of laborers. The sharecropper's income is also reduced considerably before it enters into his level of living, because of the system of advances which, as in the older South, exists in this area. In the spring at the beginning of the cotton season the sharecropper is usually without resources upon which to live through the coming summer. The landlord provides advances through the cotton season. These advances may be in the form of cash, of provisions, or of a credit account with a local merchant. After the cotton is sold there is a settlement in which the sharecropper is charged a flat interest rate on the total amount of his advances. While no statistical data are available as to the interest rate, there is reason to believe that it is not less than the 10 per cent or more which is charged in many areas of the South 1/. The landlord keeps the books, and the sharecropper is often too uninformed to question the account, or, particularly in the case of the Negro, afraid to do so.

The day laborer is dependent for his income almost entirely upon what he and the members of his family can earn during the period of cotton chopping and picking. This is supplemented only by such small amounts as can be picked up by doing odd jobs or by relief. This means a most precarious existence for many thousand families in the seven Lowland counties.

The few Negroes who are renters have a relatively high income. Most of the Negro owners interviewed live in a Negro colony in Pemiscot County. They have come into an area of uncleared land within the past two years, constructed rude shacks, and cultivated a few acres of land while they are in the process of clearing more land.

THEIR SAVINGS FOR THE FUTURE

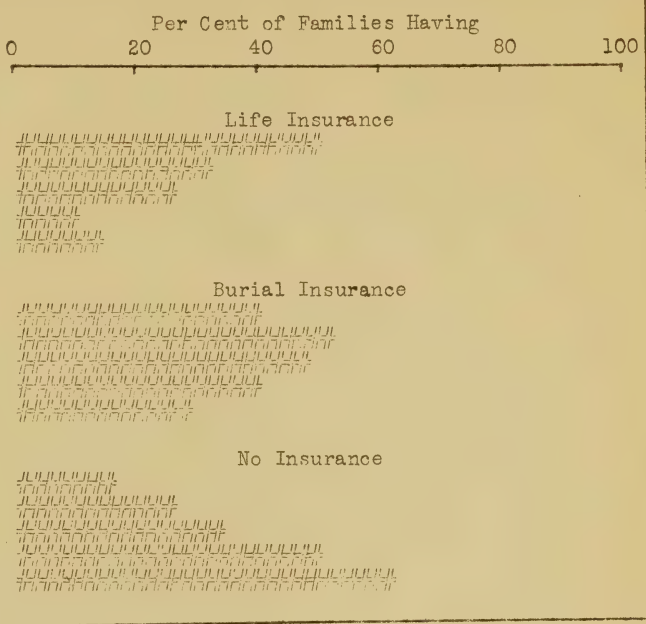
Although specific data are not available on the number of families with savings accounts or other evidences of saving, the study indicated the rarity of any form of saving among the majority of the families.

Insurance is generally recognized as a criterion of thrift and usually implies sufficient income to cover living expenses plus a surplus to be laid aside for future use. About one-half of the white farm owners, 33 per cent of the renters, 25 per cent of the croppers,

1/ Ibid, pp. 61-64.

and 11 per cent of the farm laborers carried life insurance. Only 14 per cent of the Negro families were protected by life insurance.

FIGURE 17. PER CENT OF 1097 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES HAVING LIFE INSURANCE, BURIAL INSURANCE, AND NO INSURANCE, BY COLOR AND TENURE GROUP



Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties.

Judging from the relative amounts of life and burial insurance, the families studied are interested, first, in a proper burial, and second, in security for the family in case of the death of the breadwinner. Forty per cent of the white farm owners, 52 per cent of the renters, 48 per cent of the croppers, 40 per cent of the farm laborers, and 28 per cent of all Negro families carry burial insurance as compared with 50, 33, 25, 11 and 14 carrying life insurance.

Burial insurance is popular due to the low rate, the persistent effort on the part of the undertakers and managers of funeral homes, and the feeling that "we don't want no county burials." There is evidence that some insurance agents play on the emotions of the people, collect premiums, and scheme to keep from paying burial

expenses. The following case is illustrative:

A farm laborer family of eight living in a little two-room shanty in a cotton patch--house with dirt floors, low ceiling, no windows, very few pieces of furniture, nothing with which to keep house, not even a change of clothing for the sick baby--felt that they should at least have decent burials in case of the death of a member. On the previous week, they had taken their last $1.50 to pay the burial insurance. On the day after the premium was paid, one child died of colitis and on the day the family was interviewed, another child lay at the point of death. The insurance agent came during the interview and informed the family that the burial policy did not cover colitis. "We didn't know what the policy covered because he didn't give us the paper," said the family.

Income is so low that many families manage to save only for the inevitable--death--and many of these, either through their own ignorance or the connivance of exploiters, fail to achieve the end for which they save.

THE HOUSES IN WHICH THEY LIVE

Housing conditions in the Lowland counties fail in every respect to meet the barest standards of comfort, health, and decency. It is a standard of housing so widespread and so far inferior to other parts of the State as to make extremely difficult any comparable measurement. A journey through this area presents a picture of poverty, deprivation, and hopelessness, with but few avenues of escape even for those who keep alive a flickering desire for something better. For miles around, the dull monotony of dilapidated and weather-beaten houses of the tenants and laborers can be seen and the physical pattern of these houses varies but slightly; there are not enough good houses to incite interest in anything different. The interior of the homes presents the same discouraging picture--a picture of squalor, filth, and poverty, a condition of life that destroys all hope for something better. Ironically enough, these conditions exist in a part of the State where the extremes of wealth and poverty are represented; wealth in the sense of the productive value of the soil, and poverty of the people who work this soil, a paradox of rich land--poor people.

The "strip house," with vertical siding and stripping over the cracks to keep out the weather is typical. This type of construction was reported by nearly two-thirds of the Negro and more than one-half of the white families. The "weatherboard house," which is of frame construction with drop siding, was reported by 36 per cent of the white and 15 per cent of the Negro families. Of all the Lowland families, 87 per cent live in these two kinds of dwellings. When comparison is made on the basis of tenure, the data show that each advance made on the agricultural ladder is accompanied by some improvement in the type of housing. Two-thirds of the white owners and 45 per cent of the renters live in "weatherboard houses." The housing

of Negro families is generally poor.

TABLE 12. TYPE OF DWELLING CONSTRUCTION OF 1095 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES, BY COLOR AND TENURE GROUP

Color and Tenure Group	Number of Families	Per Cent of Families Having Brick	Weather-Board	Strip House[1]	Box House[2]	Shanty	Others[3]
White-Owners	145	.7	66.2	23.5	3.4	.7	5.5
Renters	298	-	45.3	41.9	9.4	.7	2.7
Croppers	180	-	28.3	63.3	4.5	.6	3.3
Laborers	285	-	15.4	69.1	11.6	1.1	2.8
Negro-All Tenure Groups	187	-	15.0	64.2	5.9	.5	14.4

1. A variation of the box house, with narrow stripping over the cracks to keep out the weather.

2. House of rough lumber placed vertically with no stripping on the cracks.

3. Includes log construction, pole shanty, tent, stucco, and others not otherwise classified.

Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties.

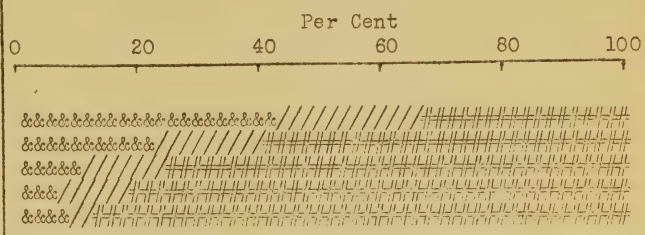
None of the houses have cellars because of the high water table and the sandy composition of the soil. They are usually built on cubical blocks of concrete, cement, or cypress wood and the open space under the houses is used as a shelter for dogs and poultry as well as for storage space. The houses near the levee are always built on cypress blocks, three or four feet in height, to protect them in times of high water.

Less than one-fourth of the houses have paint and 61 per cent have never been painted. The remainder have at one time been painted but the effects of weather and age have given them a dull and weathered appearance. The lack of paint explains the deteriorated condition of most of the houses since materials left unprotected from the elements tend to warp and leave wide openings on the sides. This creates a health problem both in the summer and winter since the wide openings present an easy access of flies and mosquitoes and makes heating difficult.

The interior of the homes are little better than the exterior. Building paper serves as wall covering in about two-fifths of the

dwellings, and one-fifth have no wall covering of any kind. Only in the more permanent homes of white owners was wallpaper found, and more than one-half of the white renters reported building paper. Twice as many Negro homes as white homes use no wall covering of any kind.

FIGURE 18. CONDITION OF DWELLING EXTERIOR OF 1076 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES BY COLOR AND TENURE GROUP.



Legend: Per Cent of Families with Houses
& -- Painted
/ -- Weathered[1]
-- Unpainted

1. Houses which have been painted but from which the paint has practically disappeared.

Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties.

TABLE 13. TYPE OF WALL COVERING IN HOUSES OF 1088 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES, BY COLOR AND TENURE GROUP

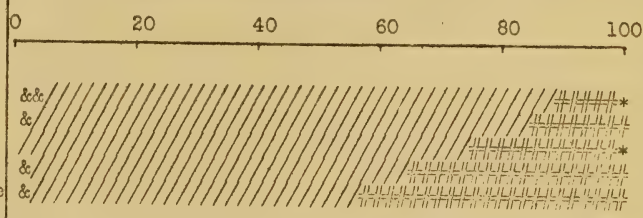
Color and Tenure Group	Number of Families	Per Cent of Families Having							
		Wall-paper	Paint	Building Paper	Card-board	News-paper	White-wash	Others	None
White-Owners	144	45.1	7.6	29.2	2.1	.7	.7	2.8	11.8
Renters	298	23.5	3.7	53.0	2.0	.7	.7	.7	15.7
Croppers	180	9.5	3.3	58.3	1.1	2.2	2.8	-	22.8
Laborers	283	6.4	1.1	53.7	2.1	4.2	.4	1.4	30.7
Negro-All Tenure Groups	183	4.9	-	44.3	4.9	6.0	.6	2.7	36.6

Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties.

Few of the cropper and laborer homes are plastered or have any kind of insulation. The roofs of many houses are in disrepair and offer little protection to the occupants from rain or snow. This is brought out more pointedly by the following statement of a village housewife: "I'm sorry the house is so upset, but since it rained I had to move the furniture out in the middle of the floor to keep it from getting wet."

In the houses of the white share-croppers and day laborers and the Negroes, the furniture includes only the bare necessities. Floor covering is almost unknown. There are not enough beds and many children sleep on thin pallets spread on the rough board floors. Tables, benches, and heating-stoves are often homemade. The supply of dishes, knives and forks, and chairs is inadequate. The family wash is almost always done on the washboard and oftentimes both tubs and boards have to be borrowed. While some families own sewing machines, telephones and radios, they are luxuries which are practically unknown among the lower income groups. The one thing owned by every laborer and sharecropper is hoe.

FIGURE 19. TYPE OF FLOORING IN HOUSES OF 1088 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES, BY COLOR AND TENURE GROUP



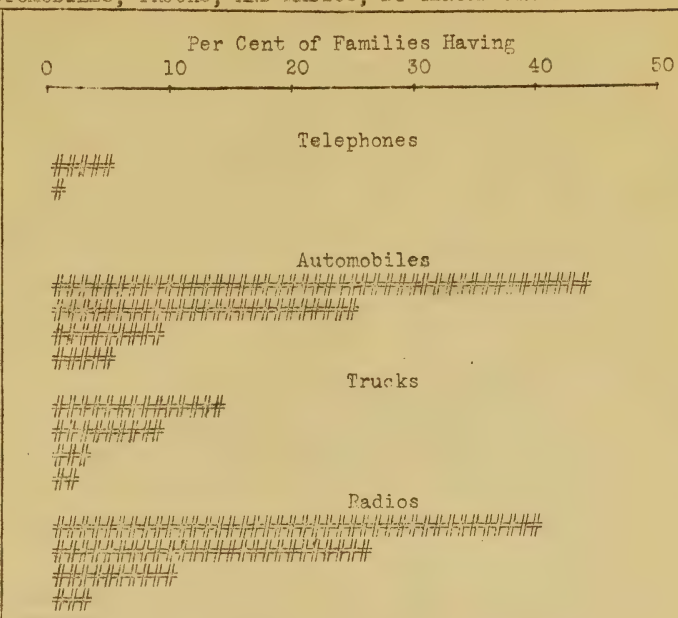
Legend: Per Cent of Families Having
& -- Hardwood
/ -- Softwood
-- Plank
* -- Earth

Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid and Pemiscot Counties.

THEIR SANITARY FACILITIES

Sanitation in this area is primitive. About 98 per cent of the households have no indoor toilet facilities. Many have no toilet facilities of any kind. Most of the outdoor toilets are of the open vault type, unscreened, and with no doors to insure privacy. Generally a piece of sacking or cloth is placed across the entrance to serve as a door.

FIGURE 20. PER CENT OF 1097 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES HAVING TELEPHONES, AUTOMOBILES, TRUCKS, AND RADIOS, BY TENURE GROUP



Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties.

The lack of improved sanitary facilities creates one of the greatest health problems in this area since the careless disposal of human excreta is the greatest cause of certain filth-borne diseases. There is a close relationship between the number of cases of typhoid fever, dysentery, hookworm, and other intestinal diseases and the method that is used for the disposal of human excreta. Furthermore, since driven wells furnish water for 97 per cent of the families, the danger of contamination is acute. Water from driven wells is obtained close to the surface of the ground and the large percentage of outdoor toilets increases the danger of contamination, as these toilets are usually close to the source of the water.

The health problem assumes greater significance when the adequacy of screening is considered. Over three-fourths of the houses have screens of some sort. No standard of scoring was followed and a house was reported as screened if it had mesh netting, mosquito bar, and other improvised means of screening. In most cases the screens are badly worn and rusted and flies and mosquitoes have little

difficulty in gaining access to the house. The incidence of malaria and typhoid is high. This can be traced directly to improper screening and poor drainage, and inadequate sanitary facilities. The usual defense offered by owners when approached on this matter of screening is that the tenants and laborers are destructive and that it would be a waste of time and money to provide screens for the houses. One landlord expressed his interest in the problem in saying: "There is no use to buy screens; they leave them open anyway. Perhaps they want to let the flies out."

WHAT THEY EAT

Salt pork, corn pone, dried beans, and occasionally a few vegetables make up the usual fare. Eggs, butter, milk, fruit, and green vegetables are seldom included in the diet. Although many families have gardens of some sort (83 per cent in 1936), they are usually small and poorly tended and little effort is made to preserve foods for winter use.

TABLE 14. PER CENT OF 1097 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES HAVING GARDENS IN 1936, BY COLOR AND TENURE GROUP

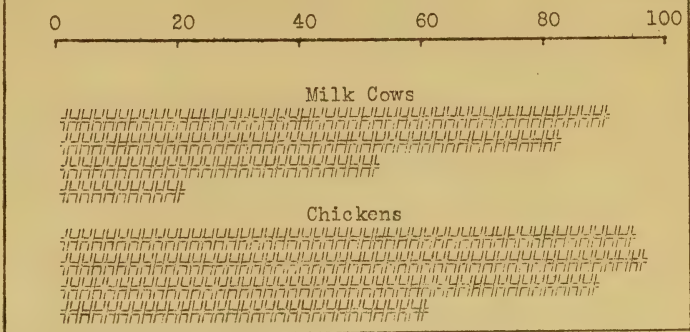
Tenure Group	Number of Families		Per Cent Having Gardens	
	White	Negro	White	Negro
Owners	146	38	96.6	97.4
Renters	298	15	97.3	93.3
Croppers	181	56	96.7	92.9
Laborers	285	79	70.5	65.8

Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties.

The prevalence of pellagra, colitis, and malnutrition is mute evidence of the effects of the food habits of the people upon their health. In spite of the fact that nearly one-half of the households have cows and that nearly three-fourths keep chickens, the use of milk and eggs in the family diet is not general. Most of the families keep only a few chickens whose value from the standpoint of egg production is negligible.

Deficient diets are both the result of ignorance and the inability of the families to provide healthful foods. One white woman, the wife of a cropper, expressed the general point of view as follows: "Yes, there is an awful lot of colitis around here, but no wonder--we can't change our food, can't afford it. It means greens, when it is season, but otherwise potatoes and beans or nothing. We would eat differently if we could get it."

FIGURE 21. PER CENT OF 1097 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES HAVING MILK COWS AND CHICKENS, BY TENURE GROUP



Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties.

The preservation of foods is also a problem. In the northern counties, particularly on the ridges, caves provide a practical method of storing and preserving foods, but in the lower plains section caves or outdoor cellars are unsatisfactory because of seepage. Some of the families dig pits but these are very poor makeshifts. Others use a tub of water, sometimes placing it under the house. These devices, however, will rarely keep foods more than a few hours during the hot summer months and the average family is forced to plan foods for immediate consumption. As a result, fresh fruits and vegetables are almost a negligible part of the diet unless they are available from family gardens.

TABLE 15. TYPE OF REFRIGERATION USED BY 1097 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES, BY COLOR AND TENURE GROUP

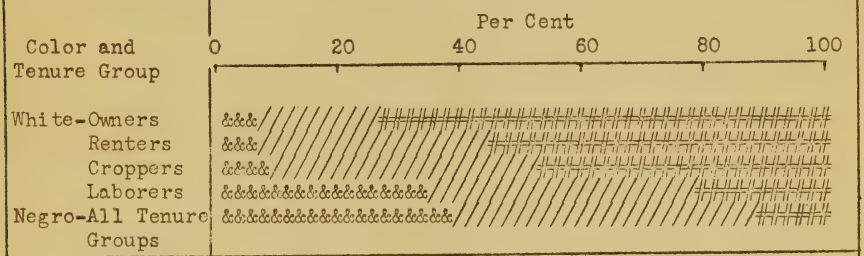
Color and Tenure Group	Number of Families	Per Cent of Families Using			
		Mechanical	Ice	Others 1/	None
White-Owners	145	12.4	37.2	9.7	40.7
Renters	298	1.0	28.5	9.7	60.8
Croppers	181	.6	11.0	14.9	73.5
Laborers	285	-	4.2	6.0	89.8
Negro-All Tenure Groups	188	-	10.1	5.9	84.0

1/ Includes refrigeration such as cellars, springs, wells and cisterns.

Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties.

It is paradoxical that the greatest amount of canning is done by white owners and renters who would logically be able to buy canned food. White croppers and laborers, and Negroes of all classes, who have greatest need for fruits and vegetables and who have less cash with which to buy supplies, can only small amounts of food. Of the white laborers studied, one-third canned no fruits or vegetables. Nearly 40 per cent of the Negroes did no canning in 1935.

FIGURE 22. FRUITS AND VEGETABLES CANNED DURING 1935 BY 1052 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES, BY COLOR AND TENURE GROUP



Legend: Per Cent of Families Canning
& -- None
/ -- 1-99 Quarts
-- 100 or More Quarts

Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid and Pemiscot Counties.

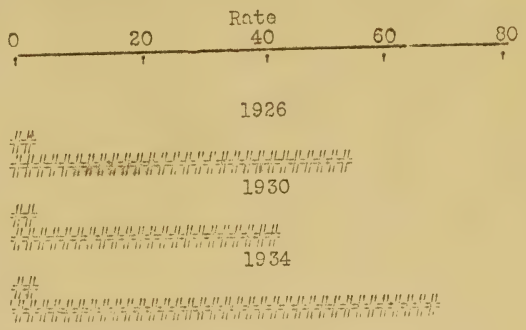
THEIR HEALTH

The mortality rates for preventable diseases are exceedingly high in the Missouri Lowlands. With very few exceptions, year after year, in all seven counties, the death rates for malaria, typhoid, pulmonary tuberculosis, pneumonia, and diarrhea and enteritis, and the infant mortality rate have been greater than the State average for Missouri. Occasionally the rates have been as high as twenty times the State average.

Two-thirds of all the deaths from malaria in the State occur in these counties. The mortality rate tells only a small part of the story about malaria, however, for the disease is chronic and year after year it undermines the health of hundreds of people. Sapping the energy of its victims, its effects are aggravated because in the cycle of cotton culture the periods of chopping and picking fall during the months of greatest malaria incidence. Individuals report that they work "between chill days." And malaria is no respector of age, for

schools report many cases of absence on "chill days"; much of the irregular school attendance, retardation, and elimination are the result, at least in part, of lowered vitality from malarial infection.

FIGURE 23. MORTALITY RATE FOR MALARIA IN MISSOURI AND IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI 1926-1934 (Rate per 100,000 Population)



Source: Adapted from Data Furnished by the State Board of Health of Missouri.

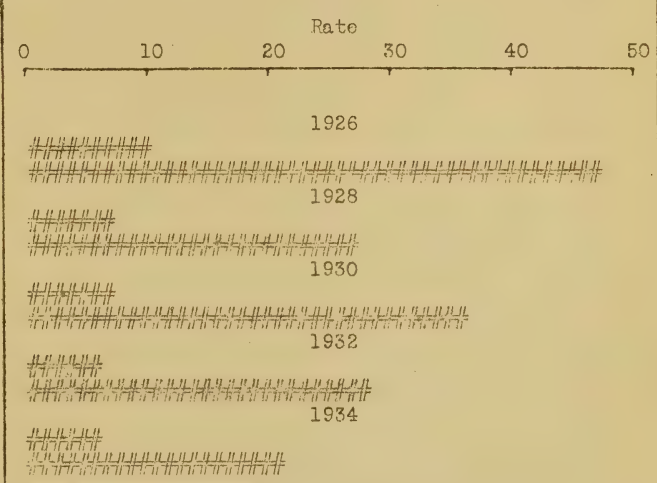
The topography and the waters have done much to localize malaria in this section of the State. The undrained swamps, drainage ditches, and rivers make natural breeding places for the mosquito. Despite the extensive drainage projects, there are still many swamps. Drainage ditches, unless dredged every two or three years, grow up in weeds and the water becomes stagnant. The Mississippi River on the east and the St. Francis on the west, as well as smaller rivers throughout the area, move sluggishly in the plain section as they wend their way southward to the Gulf. Floods in certain seasons, although greatly reduced since the construction of levees, further aggravate the problem.

Some progress has been made in the towns and urban centers in the control and eradication of malaria. But in the rural areas, where the heart of the problem lies, the ignorance concerning health measures and lack of cooperation of the people and the cost of drainage have greatly impeded proper methods of control. Adequate screening would seem to be one of the first measures to be undertaken. Rural people, however, are not conscious of the relation of an adequately screened house and the control and prevention of the disease. Many houses are not screened at all; and where screens are provided they are often left open, in bad repair, or used for other purposes.

The failure to consult a physician aggravates the disease. However, it is not difficult to see why a family which has only a hand-to-mouth existence finds it virtually impossible to pay a physician's fee. The people rely almost entirely on home remedies or patent medicines. Barns and vacant buildings are plastered with colorful advertisements of the "patent" medicines popular in the section. Drainage, except in a few districts, can probably be considered adequate, but the cost of upkeep is high. During depression years when companies are unable to collect drainage taxes, the cleaning of ditches and the drainage of ponds are neglected and malaria increases.

While the mortality rate for typhoid has been declining steadily, it is still considerably higher, except in Scott County, than the average rate for the State (Figure 24). In recent years doctors, schools, and civic clubs have combined in their efforts to combat the disease. Village and town schools, largely through the efforts of the public health nurse, have introduced inoculation. Free inoculation is provided by the county health units. The chemistry department of the Southeast Missouri State Teachers' College at Cape Girardeau will make a free test of drinking water when requested, and civic clubs have been educating people to take advantage of this service. In the rural areas, however, progress in control of the disease has

FIGURE 24. MORTALITY RATE FOR TYPHOID IN MISSOURI AND IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1926-1934 (Rate per 100,000 Population)

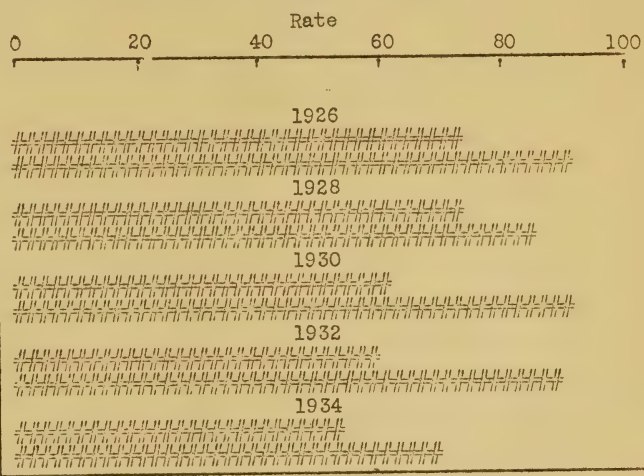


Source: Adapted from Data Furnished by the State Board of Health of Missouri.

been slow. Rural schools and patrons are not easily convinced of the importance of precautionary measures. There is little hope of improvement until effective disposal systems are generally used.

Pulmonary tuberculosis also takes a heavier toll of lives in the Southeast than in the State as a whole, although it is also declining (Figure 25).

FIGURE 25. MORTALITY RATE FOR PULMONARY TUBERCULOSIS IN MISSOURI AND IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1926-1934
(Rate per 100,000 Population)

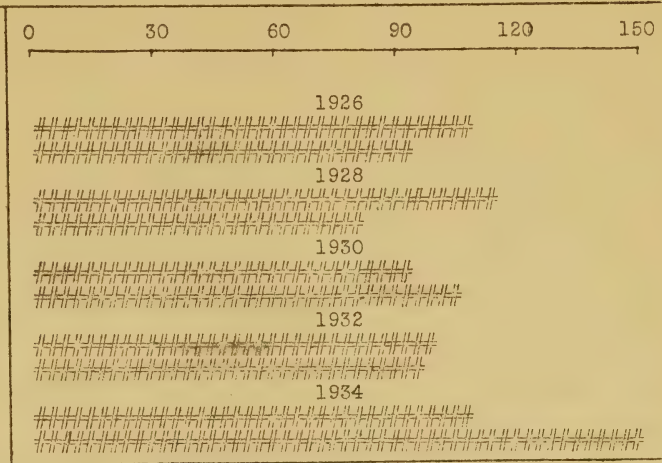


Source: Adapted from Data Furnished by the State Board of Health of Missouri.

Because of its high incidence, the State Tuberculosis Association is making a special study of this area and carrying on extensive experiments, particularly in Mississippi County where the rate is highest. Unhygienic living conditions and inadequate and poorly balanced diets induce colds, sore throat, influenza, and other respiratory difficulties, and improper treatment and neglect lead to pneumonia or activate tuberculosis. Ignorance in the care of the disease, in turn, results in its spread to other members of the family.

More deaths result from pneumonia than from either typhoid or tuberculosis. The low altitude and relatively high humidity, combined with inadequate nutrition, low living standards, and lack of medical and hospital service, operate to produce a high incidence of pneumonia. The death rate shows no tendency to decline, and with a few exceptions, remains higher for most of the counties than for the State as a whole (Figure 26.)

FIGURE 26. MORTALITY RATE FOR PNEUMONIA IN MISSOURI AND IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1926-1934
(Rate per 100,000 Population)

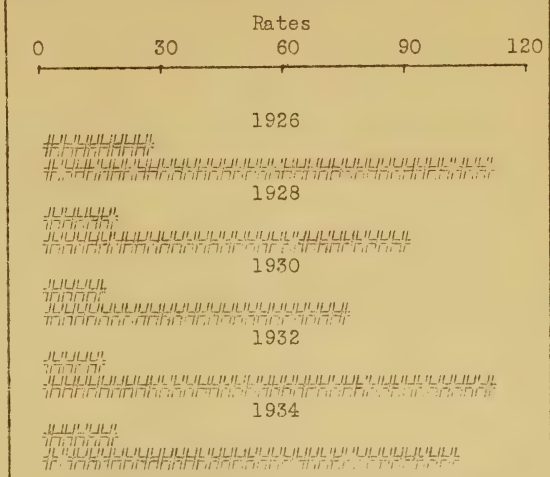


Source: Adapted from Data Furnished by the State Board of Health in Missouri.

The high death rate for children under two years of age from diarrhea and enteritis is distinct testimony to the low living standards and lack of knowledge of child care (Figure 27). If the morbidity rate for children were available it would further magnify the problem. During the hot summer months intestinal disturbances are chronic. The general opinion of the more illiterate mothers is that diarrhea is caused by hot weather and cannot be avoided. Little concern is given to appropriate summer diets. Hot breads, fried foods, and overcooked vegetables are as common in summer as in winter. Foods are generally exposed to flies, and refrigeration is usually lacking. In Pemiscot, Dunklin, and New Madrid Counties, where sharecropping and day labor are more commonly used in cotton production, the death rate is persistently higher than in the other counties in the area. The high mortality rate from diarrhea and enteritis for the population over two years indicated that the disease is not confined entirely to children (Figure 28).

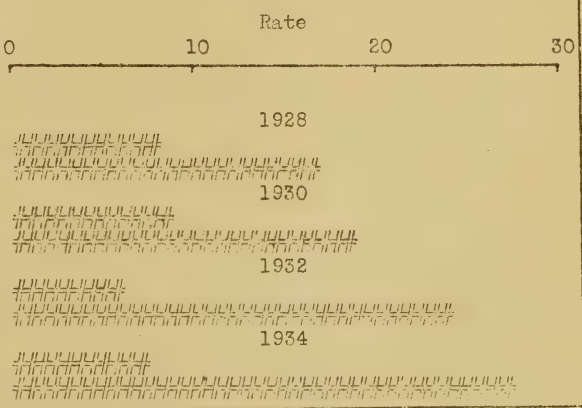
The infant mortality rate is higher in every one of these counties than the State average, and is more than twice as high in some of the counties (Fig. 29). Again, generally low living standards and the ignorance and poverty which are associated with degrading social conditions are the apparent causes.

FIGURE 27. MORTALITY RATE FOR DIARRHEA AND ENTERITIS AMONG CHILDREN UNDER TWO YEARS IN MISSOURI AND IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1926-1934
(Rate per 100,000 Population)



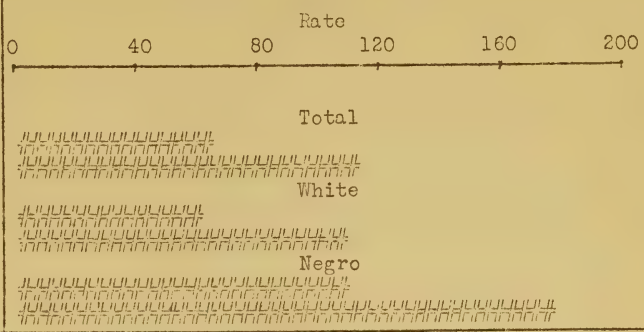
Source: Adapted from Data Furnished by the State Board of Health of Missouri.

FIGURE 28. MORTALITY RATE FOR DIARRHEA AND ENTERITIS AMONG POPULATION OVER TWO YEARS OF AGE IN MISSOURI AND IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, 1928-1934
(Rate per 100,000 Population)



Source: Adapted from Data Furnished by the State Board of Health of Missouri.

FIGURE 29. INFANT MORTALITY RATE IN MISSOURI AND IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI BY COLOR, 1934
(Infant Deaths per 1,000 Live Births)



Source: Adapted from Data Furnished by the State Board of Health of Missouri.

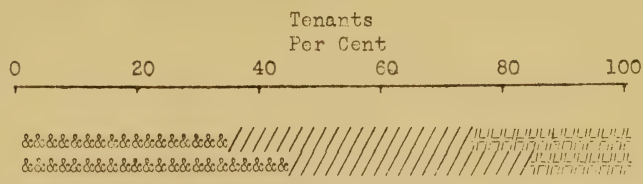
THEIR INSECURITY OF TENURE

The movement from farm to farm among families is considerable. As reported by the Census of Agriculture in 1935, 43 per cent of the tenants (including sharecroppers but not day laborers) had been on their present farms less than one year. Mobility among tenants generally is high, but the rate is considerably above that of the 34 per cent for the State of tenants who had been on their present farms less than one year. Even among the owner-operators the mobility is greater here than in the State as a whole. Only 7 per cent of the owners in the State had been on their present farms less than one year as compared with 16 per cent in Southeast Missouri.

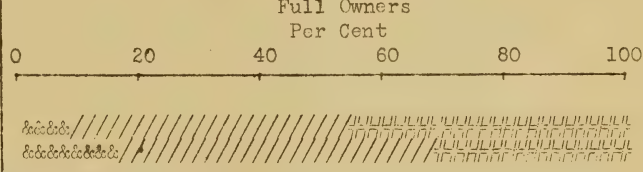
The mobility among day laborers is even greater than among renters and sharecroppers. Among 1,091 farm families, 2 per cent of the white owners, 23 per cent of the white renters, 34 per cent of the white sharecroppers, and 44 per cent of the white laborers have moved on the average twice in five years or more frequently. Among the Negroes, the laborers are also the most mobile tenure group.

A high rate of mobility is expected in a system of cotton tenancy. With little or nothing to lose, the tenant moves constantly with the hope of improving his lot. In Southeast Missouri, this mobility is accelerated. Laborers are imported from Arkansas and Tennessee during the cotton season and return at the end of the season. Levee workers move in and out of agriculture. The ownership of the land changes and a shake-up in the tenants occurs. The land is flooded and the tenants move on, their places being taken by tenants who move in.

FIGURE 30. NUMBER OF YEARS ON PRESENT FARM FOR TENANTS AND FULL OWNERS IN MISSOURI AND IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI, JANUARY 1, 1935



Legend: Per Cent of Operators on Present Farms
& -- Less than One Year
/ -- 1-4 Years
-- 5 Years and Over

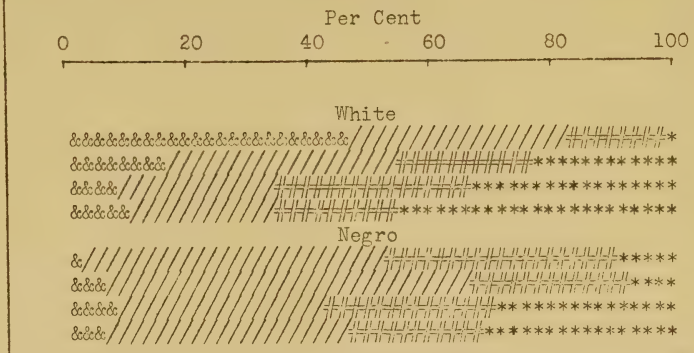


Legend: Per Cent of Operators on Present Farm
& -- Less than One Year
/ -- 1-14 Years
-- 15 Years and Over

Source: United States Census of Agriculture, 1935.

This unusually high rate of mobility affects adversely many phases of the life of the people. For example, it is not unusual for a teacher to begin her term of school with an enrollment of 35 to 40 pupils and by the end of eight months have only 10 to 15 of the same pupils. Because of the shifting about, children of school age become retarded or quit school altogether. These semi-transients do not attach themselves to organizations in the community, with an adverse effect both on themselves and the community. The small proportion of attendance at established churches is the result in part of the high rate of mobility which discourages membership in the church. The emergence of the night club, with its bar, gambling devices, dance floors, and other diversions is also related to the impermanence of residence. Landlords are not interested in constructing adequate homes for roving tenants.

FIGURE 31. MOBILITY OF 1091 FARM FAMILIES IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES, BY COLOR AND TENURE GROUP 1/



Legend: & -- Per Cent of Families making No Moves
Per Cent of Families Moving on the Average
/ -- Less Than Once in 5 Years
-- One to Two Times in Five Years
* -- Two or More Times in Five Years

1/ The number of moves on which this table is based represent the changes in residence. The period for which mobility was recorded was between 1936 and one of two dates: (1) the year of marriage, or (2) 1920, if the head was married before 1920.

Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties.

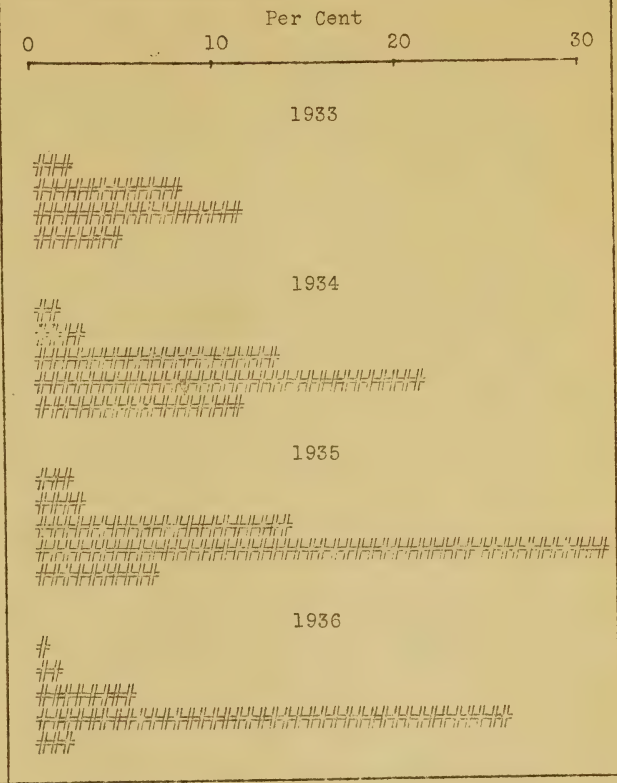
THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELIEF IN THEIR LIVES

The extent to which relief is received by farm families is closely associated with tenure status and race. Only a small percentage of the owner-operators and renters receive relief. Even the proportion of sharecroppers is not unusually high. But the percentage of day laborers receiving relief at some time during the year has been more than 30 per cent.

In the older cotton areas farther south, with the coming of the depression and the Federal relief program, there was considerable conflict between the tradition that the landlord should take care of his cotton tenants, on one hand, and the advantages of transferring the financial burden of taking care of the tenants during the winter months to the relief agencies, on the other. Actually, many of the landlords did shift the burden to the relief agencies 1/. In South-

1/ Ibid, Chapter X.

FIGURE 32. PER CENT OF 1097 FARM FAMILIES RECEIVING RELIEF IN DUNKLIN, NEW MADRID, AND PEMISCOT COUNTIES AT SOME TIME DURING THE YEAR IN 1933, 1934, 1935 and 1936, BY COLOR AND TENURE GROUP



Source: Survey of 1533 Households in Dunklin, New Madrid, and Pemiscot Counties.

east Missouri, the traditional attitude was much less effective than in most of the areas of the older South and the exploitation of the potentialities of the relief program was much more vicious. A practice was adopted of substituting day labor for sharecroppers, in maintaining low wage rates for day labor, and of assuming that the relief agencies would take care of the laborers when they had no work.

While the need for relief among Negroes was as great as among whites, or probably greater, the proportion of them receiving relief was much less than that of whites. Before a Negro can receive relief, he must be in much more desperate straits than a white man. Among many members of the Negro group there was a general attitude that relief was not for them.

CHAPTER VI

THEIR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Institutions, such as schools, churches, farm organizations, women's organizations, lodges and civic clubs are not particularly effective in maintaining individual and community social standards in Southeast Missouri. In order to do so they must be effectively organized and their advantages must extend to all members of the community. Here the institutions fail in many respects to meet these requirements.

CHURCHES

While the established churches are found in abundance in towns and urban centers, in the rural areas, particularly among the white share-croppers and laborers and among Negroes, emotional religion prevails. The most important churches in the area, considering numbers and membership, are the methodist Episcopal Church South and the Missionary Baptist; there are many General Baptist organizations and a few Presbyterian, Christian, Church of Christ, and Lutheran organizations. The Catholic Church continues to be of importance in the older centers of population, where descendants of older settlers, many of whom were German and French, are found. Several years ago a colony of the Reformed Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints settled in the area. In the rural sections, it is very unusual to find a purely rural church maintaining full time services and some are closed. Both in the urban centers and the rural areas many churches are without services at the present time and others are able to maintain only part-time or irregular services, but the open country church seems to be suffering the greatest decline.

These established churches are evidently not meeting the needs of all the people for there are springing into existence a large number of newer, less stabilized forms of religious groups. They are known under a variety of names, such as Nazarenes, Holy Rollers, Pentecost, One-God Church, Church of Jesus Christ, and Sanctified. It is these sporadic, emotional sects which are providing religious services for a large number of white laborers and share-croppers, and for Negroes.

In some instances, such congregations have erected crude buildings. In New Madrid an old store building houses the Church of Jesus Christ; others have been made from rough lumber. When buildings are not financially possible, schoolhouses or homes are used. In some sections, brush shelters arranged on posts about head high are erected for summer meetings. In East Prairie, a more permanent and larger tabernacle has been built and is known as the Five States Tabernacle. It is used as a gathering place for the Church of God. Each summer a ten-day song and preaching service is held which draws crowds of eight to ten thousand people from Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Illinois. All-day meetings are held and a joint choir

presents a song service each day which attracts people from other denominations.

The ministers in many of these churches are poorly trained, often having no education beyond the grade school. The majority of them receive no regular salary but, as they frequently express it, "work with their hands" to earn their living and, "give freely of their time to God". In one instance, a minister of the Church of Jesus Christ is employed irregularly in a saw mill. A Pentecost preacher practices the barber trade in his local community. Many are share-croppers or farm laborers.

In general, the members of these churches are poor and often illiterate. Large numbers have received relief at various times and many are on W. P. A. jobs. When interviewed they emphasize the fact that they can go to their own church without being "dressed up" and are welcome. They feel that they are not wanted at services of the more established organizations, and welcome the opportunity for initiative and leadership within their own group which they would not find elsewhere. They are very demonstrative in their worship and find emotional outlet in testimony and in song. Meetings provide an opportunity for social contacts which would otherwise be lacking. Their organizations are very unstable; it is not uncommon for a few members to disagree with their leaders and break away to set up another branch.

Most of these religious sects accept the theory of divine healing. The members frequently refuse medical attention and call in other members to pray them through their health difficulty. They are of the opinion that most doctors are irreligious and antagonistic to the theory of healing through faith. The ministers insist the choice of medical service is left entirely to the individual but speak with pride and religious fervor of the fact that they have not taken a dose of medicine for years. With unhealthful conditions prevailing, it seems especially unfortunate that religious teachings serve to minimize the necessity of disease prevention and treatment. As long as "faith healing" is depended upon to the exclusion of medical service by a large proportion of the lower economic groups, health conditions will not improve.

Among the negroes both established churches and sporadic branches are found. Of the established denominations the Missionary Baptist and the Methodist Episcopal South are the most common with the former having far the greater number of organizations. The most important of the sporadic branches are the Pentecost, Holiness, and Sanctified. There are comparatively few church edifices; religious meetings are held in homes, schoolhouses, brush arbors, and open-air tabernacles. Rarely do the ministers have full-time pastorates but often serve three or four communities. They are poorly trained for the most part; some of the Methodist and Baptist ministers have college training, but Pentecost, Holiness, or Sanctified preachers rarely have more than a common school education.

SCHOOLS

It is quite usual in the United States to look to education as the solution of many of the social ills. In Southeast Missouri where the social conditions are woefully lagging, the need for a competent system of public education to overcome the deficiencies is particularly great. The school system, however, is not organized to make this contribution. Inefficient grade schools, inadequate hich schools, and still poorer opportunities for Negroes are the chief characteristics of public education in the Lowlands counties.

For the great majority of the county population, the system of elementary education is one of multiplicity of school districts, of one-teacher schools, of unapproved schools, or poorly trained and low-paid teachers, and of irregular attendance. There are about 370 separate school districts in the seven counties. About 70 of the districts are town or city or consolidated, but the remaining 300 are rural. Of the 300 one-teacher schools and the 100 or more 2-3-, or 4- or more-teacher schools which exist in the 300 rural districts, only 24 schools in the seven counties are approved by the State Department of Education as being up to the standard for elementary schools. Most of the county children attend schools in which the buildings and grounds are below standard, equipment inadequate, library facilities limited, and community activity and cooperation unsatisfactory. The teachers are poorly trained and receive low salaries. One-fifth of the teachers in the 300 rural districts have no college training; another one-fourth have less than one year; and another one-fifth have less than two years. More than one-half of the teachers have only county certificates; one-fourth have state certificates; and only one-seventh have the most desirable certificates, those issued by state colleges after the individual has received professional training. The average annual salary for the white rural teachers is about $500.

Most of the schools have terms of eight months, but a number have terms of less than that. The elementary school pupils in the open country are thus considerably handicapped as compared with those pupils who can attend a nine-months school. The handicap is greatly increased by the fact that the individuals in the rural schools attend only intermittently. The average attendance for these is only 54 per cent. On the average, the rural pupil attends school slightly more than half the time school is in session. It is quite common for pupils to be kept out of school to work in the fields. The shifting of families from one community to another and consequently from one school district to another frequently results in pupils missing a portion of the school year. There is evidence of considerable retardation.

A characteristic of rural education here is the divided term. That is, school is dismissed in the fall for cotton picking and in the spring for cotton chopping. To make up the time lost, school is held during a part of the summer when children are not needed in the fields. Local people speak of "cotton vacation", meaning the

dismissal of schools during the busy season on farms. It is far from a vacation, however, since all children above the age of six or seven are likely to be working in the fields. The effect of dividing the school term is definitely handicapping to the pupils. Not only is their progress interrupted, but it is almost impossible for them to study efficiently during the hot summer time when their schools are in session.

The high schools are inadequately serving the open country population. They are located in about 70 town, city, or consolidated districts. In the remaining 300 districts, it is necessary to arrange with one of the districts having high schools for the education of pupils. Of the 14,400 children of high school age in the seven Lowlands counties, 5,800 live in districts which do not have high schools. The necessity for having to arrange with other districts for high school training discourages many of the children in the open country area from attending high school; in addition, transportation facilities are very inadequate. Of 572 eighth grade graduates in the rural districts in the spring of 1934, only 332 entered high school in the autumn.

The system of public education for Negroes is distinctly inferior to that for whites. Negro and white schools are maintained separately in the State of Missouri, and the number of Negro schools are fewer and therefore less available than white schools, the teachers are not as well trained, the buildings are often ramshackle, libraries are inadequate, and play space and playgrounds are limited. The average salary for colored teachers in the rural districts is only about $370. Attendance by Negro pupils is more irregular than that of whites. There are only 6 Negro high schools in the area; Dunklin and Stoddard Counties have no Negro high schools. The total enrollment in the 6 high schools for the school year 1934-1935 was 323, which is only a small percentage of the Negroes of high school age in the area.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Certain agencies of a social, fraternal, and recreational nature, such as clubs, lodges, and less formal agencies may for want of a better term be classified as social services. One of their main objectives may be educational but any organization that furnishes an opportunity for people to get together may be classed as rendering a definite social service.

While women's clubs, civic clubs, lodges, farm organizations, and boys' and girls' clubs are found in abundance both in variety and numbers in Southeast Missouri, their membership does not include the great mass of farm laborers, share-croppers, and Negroes. Public recreational facilities are limited, and the more desirable forms of commercial recreation are not available to the low income groups.

These latter groups provide their own form of recreation, through the night clubs or roadhouses which are springing up at highway intersections function to provide recreation to a considerable number of low-income people.

Among the more formal organizations in the area are 25 Federated Clubs, 60 Home Demonstration Clubs, and 123 4-H Clubs. All of the counties except New Madrid have Farm Bureaus. All trade centers of 1,500 or more have active men's civic clubs, organized under a variety of names, such as Commercial Club, Chamber of Commerce, Business Men's Club, Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis; in one town of Dunklin County, the American Legion is the chief civic organization. Although in terms of membership and irregularity of meetings, the fraternal organizations are decidedly on the decline, the Masons, Odd Fellows, Eastern Star, Rebekah, Woodman of the World, Modern Woodman, Royal Neighbors, Knights of Pythias, Knights of Columbus, and Ben Hur orders are all represented in the area. Future farmers of America, a national organization of farm boys enrolled in high schools, also exists in the area. That these various organizations reach only a very small segment of the farm population is indicated by their urban nature or by the fact that the total membership of the Federated Clubs is only 599, of the Home Demonstration Clubs only 1,103, and of the 4-H Clubs only 1,249 in a total population of nearly 200,000.

In the less formal organizations, the farm laborers, sharecroppers, and Negroes are somewhat better represented. The schools, of course, provide athletics, particularly baseball, soft ball, and basketball. Here again the low-income groups are neglected, however, simply because many of the children do not go to high school. Outside the schools, athletic organizations for both adults and youths are important. Thirty-seven white and three Negro baseball teams existed in the summer of 1936. Soft ball teams are also being organized.

Of other forms of recreation, it may in general be said that they are largely individual matters. Few communities feel any great sense of responsibility toward planning a program for either adults or children. The school remains the chief center for social life in most communities, and such responsibility as is not assumed by this institution is left largely to some form of commercial agency. Family visiting, fishing, swimming, Saturday afternoon journeys to town, and dancing, particularly among the Negroes, are of course important. The annual event or celebration -- watermelon festivals, trade days sponsored by business men, farmers' days or picnics, homecoming weeks -- is quite popular in the Lowlands. Carnivals and community fairs draw large crowds and also many nickels and dimes. Of the various forms of commercialized recreation, movies are important though people of low incomes can rarely attend. Pool halls are found in all sizes of population groups.

Perhaps the most significant development in recreation, so far as the low-income classes are concerned, is the emergence of the night club or roadhouse. These night clubs are springing up in the open country and are attracting the farm population. Some are well supervised and cater to a well-behaved class of people in search of wholesome recreation, but others make little attempt at regulation. The latter attract particularly the farm laborer class. They are exceedingly active during the period of cotton chopping and cotton picking. Farm laborers receive their weekly pay on Saturday from their employers, and the roadhouses with their dance halls, beer taverns, gambling rooms, slot machines, and other diversions, in turn, get their share. Negro roadhouses, it is said, are open only on Saturday and Sunday, because by Monday morning the Negro has spent everything. Perhaps nothing is more indicative of the instability of the population in the area than the development of these roadhouses.